

## VIEWPOINTS:

*Contemporary Issues of Thought and Life*

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*Viewpoints No. 6*

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# ASTROLOGY AND PREDICTION

IN THE LIGHT OF HISTORY,  
SCIENCE AND RELIGION

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CLEMENT F. ROGERS, M.A.

*Professor Emeritus of Pastoral Theology,  
King's College, University of London.*

*The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,  
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.*  
SHAKESPEARE, *Julius Caesar*.

SCM PRESS LTD

56 BLOOMSBURY STREET  
LONDON WC1

Theology Library  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
AT CLAREMONT  
California

*First published in Viewpoint Series February 1948*  
*Distributed in Canada by our exclusive agents*  
*The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited*  
*70 Bond Street, Toronto*  
*Made and Printed in Great Britain*  
*by The Stanhope Press Limited*  
*Rochester : : Kent*

University of Southern California



Religion  
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170.5 V6712

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PART I

ASTROLOGY

CHAPTER I

*What is Superstition?*

*“Superstition is, when things are either abhorred or observed with a zealous or fearful, but erroneous relation to God—HOOKER, Ecclesiastical Polity, Bk. V, Ch. iii, § 2.*

PEOPLE must believe something. If they have nothing sensible to believe, they will believe nonsense. There is a natural desire in every man to understand the world all round him. He wants to put two and two together and find out what they make. Specially is he anxious to find out about the future.

The Church is often accused of being obscurantist. Her enemies say she always opposes education and wishes to keep the masses in ignorance. If that is so she is most amazingly foolish. For ignorant people will not understand her philosophy and are sure to believe some form of folly. Every man must have a creed of some sort. The definition of Superstition in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (hereafter quoted as O.E.D.) is:

“(a) Unreasoning awe or fear of something unknown, mysterious or imaginary, especially in connection with religion; religious belief or practice grounded upon fear or ignorance.

“(b) In particularised sense: an irrational religious belief or practice; a tenet, scruple, habit, etc., grounded on fear and ignorance.”

So, naturally, the cure for Superstition lies in knowledge, in Science, provided that you use the word in its proper meaning of ordered and tested knowledge of any kind and not merely as meaning the one form of Natural Science.

## I

We are surrounded by Superstition in England to-day. It is all around us to a degree hardly suspected by educated people. Yet its symptoms are before our eyes everywhere, if we will but keep them open. We can see them in the popular Press, in the wares of the little news-vendors' shops, and that not only in the poorer districts of our towns, in the advertisements of people who make a living out of this “unreasoning awe or fear of something unknown”.

There is a little pamphlet by the Rev. G. R. Ballein called *What is Superstition? A Trail of Unhappiness*.<sup>1</sup> Its aim is to call attention to the extent and variety of different kinds of Superstition flourishing all round us. “No one,” he writes in his opening words, “can doubt that superstition is increasing by leaps and bounds.”

He goes on to give his evidence. Superstition about doing things on a Friday; about touching wood (a pip will do) for luck, and about passing under a ladder everywhere there is no risk of paint being splashed upon the heads; about numbers (houses numbered thirteen and

<sup>1</sup> Church Assembly Press & Publications Board, 3d.

hard to let, and "great liners scheduled to sail on the thirteenth delay their departure till midnight has struck"), and about upsetting salt; about charms, picking up pins, curing aches and pains by carrying about dried toads' legs in a bag round your neck (price half a crown), about horseshoes, hollow stones that rattle, and rabbits' paws.

There is a flourishing trade in mascots, varying in price from 20s. to 1s. 6d. Some you can get cheaper—a sprig of white heather, four-leaved clover, a winkle shell that twists the wrong way. During a submarine campaign, however, a caul to preserve you from drowning costs as much as fifteen pounds. Then there are omens: an ordinary hearse, if it meets a wedding procession; a picture that falls from a wall; a new moon seen through glass (this is hard on people who wear spectacles); the breaking of a looking-glass. All these surround life with fears. Then there are dream books, a plentiful supply. One shop alone furnished the author with ten varieties, and the proprietor apologised for two more that were out of stock for the moment. Still, there is some comfort in the fact that if one gives a bad interpretation of a dream you can get a more favourable one from another at a very slight cost.

## II

The subject of Superstition can be approached from another side. Mr. Balleine's pamphlet calls our attention to the symptoms; the causes which produce them can be studied in the popular weekly and monthly publications which find a ready sale among the superstitious. One in particular I have in mind. It appeals to a particular type of uneducated thought; the same type as that to which



popular Secularism addresses itself. It is interesting as showing how various forms of credulity are interconnected. "Oh, yes," said the proprietor of the shop where I bought it, "we sell a great many of those."

It is a queer jumble, but the different strands are not difficult to sort out. The title shows that the leading idea is that of the desire to know the future. It abounds in generalities about "influences" and "probabilities", and carefully avoids any very definite prediction. The editor and his contributors are obviously hampered. They would like to say more, but must avoid anything that is legally "fortune telling". They know that by the Vagrancy Act of 1824 (5 Geo. 4th ed. 3) they might be prosecuted as "rogues and vagabonds", and are liable to imprisonment or even, if proved incorrigible, to a whipping.

The cover has a design showing a man apparently naked standing in the attitude in which old-fashioned family Bibles represented patriarchs and prophets as "marvelling". Behind him is a circle with the signs of the zodiac, most obligingly spreading themselves out so as all twelve appear in the parts of the circle not hidden by his body. Seated in front of him is a Sibyl in a dress something like that of a nun. With her right hand she traces the lines of an open hand while she steadily looks away from them into a crystal ball which she is fingering with her left. Round the ball are dealt out eight playing cards, and behind are two pyramids, partly hidden by a phrenological chart for interpreting the meaning of bumps on the head.

The contents are correspondingly varied and interesting. We may sort them under four heads. First and most prominent, especially on the business side repre-



sented by the advertisements, are matters dealing with the stars by what is called an ancient science. The influence of the stars in the month of the issue on those born in various other months is freely offered. A daily calendar of advice is printed, together with mystic astronomical signs "for all birthdays". Offers of individual horoscopes are made in the advertisements at prices ranging from one shilling ("expert delineation, the accuracy of which will amaze you") to two guineas ("a full horoscope with reading and one year's directions").

Then there are items dealing with what we may describe as lucky charms. We find advertisements of amulets containing "nine drops from England's most famous wishing well", which entitle you to nine wishes, though, to be quite fair, it does not say that you will get what you wish for. A hundred thousand of these have been sold in the last five years. Bracelets can be had for the modest sum of two guineas (special offer made for £1. 2s. 6d.) which "polarise the aura" and give a "proved power increase of 200 per cent" (of course, two hundred times nothing is nothing). Genuine pieces of lucky cork affixed to Christmas cards "honestly worth one shilling each", will be sent for fourpence or "half a dozen (with envelopes) for 1s. 9d., post free".

Again, there are what we may group together as prophecies: "One of the most courageous vicars of the English Church to-day" has perfectly fulfilled symbolic dreams "of the Derby winner", but unfortunately "on each occasion no one was present who could use the information"; indeed, in the first "it was only after the race that its meaning was made manifest". Characters can be read from handwriting: "even the dot of the 'i' may show rhythm at its strongest", and Palmistry is

recommended for study because "its prize is the key of Understanding that unlocks the doors of Destiny". Free information is offered about the Rosicrucian Order, "the oldest arcane organisation in the world", which will save you the trouble of looking up the article "Rosicrucianism" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* in the nearest public library and finding out what the Society of Rosicrucians really was.

Finally, there are numbers of advertisements of medicines and clairvoyants, of psychometry by post, side by side with others offering introductions to lonely people, of patent medicines and treatments, even of more doubtful advertisements addressed to married men (in capital letters) offering to send appliances "under plain cover". There are stories of how by mere thought-power one of these gifted people watched a bomb fall "and ordered it to fall where it would do the least harm". There is an article on eyeless sight, though correspondents relating their visions, it must be acknowledged, are wisely and kindly advised not to put too much faith in them.

### III

What is behind all this mass of confused thought, of "unreasoning awe or fear of something unknown, mysterious or imaginary", which we saw was the first definition of Superstition in the *Oxford Dictionary*? What is the root error of each of these four classes of Superstition? For it is only by diagnosing a disease that a cure can be found.

The first can be summed up under the head of *Astrology*. Astrology implies the belief that material things have an

influence which they do not really possess. It attributes to Matter things which only belong to the highest orders of Life, Mind, and Personality. As long ago as 1727 *Chambers' Encyclopædia* defined it as:

“That which pretends or foretells moral events, i.e. such as have a dependence on the free will and agency of man, as if that were directed by the stars.”

The second may be grouped together under the title of *Magic*. Magic credits things on earth, and specially living things, stones, springs, plants, and animals with similar powers. It attributes to them influences which only belong to Mind, Intelligence, and Will. It is defined in the *Oxford Dictionary* as:

“The pretended art of influencing the course of events, and of producing marvellous physical phenomena, by processes supposed to owe their efficiency to their power of compelling the intervention of spiritual beings, or of bringing into operation some occult controlling principle of nature.”

The third may be classified as forms of *Wizardry and Witchcraft*. Certain people are supposed to have special powers or knowledge of occult laws. These powers have often been explained as attained by compacts with evil spirits and in most cases the people have been women. A man skilled in occult arts is generally called a wizard. The definition of a witch in the *Oxford Dictionary* is:

“A female magician, sorceress; in later use, *esp.* A woman supposed to have dealings with the devil or evil spirits and to be able by their co-operation to perform supernatural acts.”

Finally, there is what is called *Necromancy*. This is concerned with communications, supposed or real, with the dead, who are often assumed to have knowledge of

the future. Only certain persons are believed to be mediums between the dead and the living. It does not attribute personal powers to material things or mere plant and animal life or try to deal with evil spirits, but claims to be dealing with persons who have "passed over". The definition of Necromancy, drawn from a very crude use of the word through centuries, in the *Oxford Dictionary* is:

"The pretended art of revealing future events, etc., by means of communication with the dead."

#### IV

All of these have a long history. None of them is a new thing. They have been criticised and examined. What is true in them has been separated from the false. Their evil results have been chronicled. There is no excuse for the widespread Superstition of the present day.

These forms are manifold, but there is one feature common to nearly all of them—the desire to know the future, which is generally believed to be fixed and irrevocable. Prediction, either of influences or of definite events, is the main interest of all. The law against fortune telling referred to above is the chief check on the open expression of this interest, but it is hidden there nearly always.

The most typical and characteristic form of this Superstition, and the one apparently most widespread, is Astrology. Let us see what Astrology is. Let us look at its history. Let us see what it teaches. Let us see the difference between it and Astronomy. Let us see how it can best be met by Science and Sense.



## CHAPTER II

### *Astrology in History*

*“Speaking frankly, superstition, which is widespread among the nations, has taken advantage of human weakness to cast its spell over the minds of almost every man”—*

CICERO, *De Divinatione*, Bk. II.

THE so-called Science of Astrology is impressive. It has a great show of learning, and this is no doubt the cause of its long history through the ages and its wide spread in the present. To quote Mr. Balleine’s little pamphlet again:

“If you construct an extremely complicated diagram called a horoscope, and then work out a large number of extremely complicated sums to discover the exact position of all the planets and signs of the zodiac, you begin to think that after all this work there must be some value in the result. Whereas it is entirely valueless unless it is based on a truth.”

This shows a knowledge of human nature. Because work is a necessary factor in all production of wealth, many people seem to think you have only to work and something valuable is created. But, in fact, work may be quite useless. You may plough the sands diligently, but you will get no crops.

Is Astrology based on a truth? He continues: “Before you can really believe in Astrology you must accept three dogmas:

“(1) There are eight powerful gods, namely Mercury, Venus, Mars, etc., each with a different purpose in life, which they are trying to fulfil.

“(2) Each of these has his own planet, which is his private power station and signal station.

“(3) Whenever in the vast immensities of space one planet gets at a certain angle to our earth, its god suddenly acquires enormous influence over us.”

And he adds: “No one really believes this.”

But if it is true, as undoubtedly it is, that no one really believes this, how are we to account for its long history?

The value of a dictionary is not so much that it tells us what words mean. It is rather that a good dictionary tells us what men have meant by the words they used. Words get their meaning by use, and when people discuss things together they find out if they are using them in different senses, and so get to know what exactly the sense, or senses, the words have. Then the dictionary makers examine how writers and speakers have used them, so that we can get our ideas clear and understand what we are talking about.

So the *Oxford Dictionary* tells us that *Astrologia* was the earliest term in Greek, and that subsequently *Astronomia* was introduced. So, too, *Astrologia* was the early popular word in Latin for any study of the stars, and *Astronomia* took its place later as the scientific term, while *Astrologia* passed into the sense of “star-divination”. In old French and the English spoken in England in the Middle Ages, *Astronomie* seems to have been the earlier

and general word, *Astrologie* having been subsequently introduced for the "art" or practical application of astronomy to mundane affairs, and was thus "gradually limited in the seventeenth century to the reputed influence of the stars unknown to science" (i.e. to *Natural Science*). The word is not found in Shakespeare.

Thus originally the word "Astrology" meant any kind of study of the stars, but from the beginning such study was naturally undertaken for practical purposes, and in modern times, to give the O.E.D. definition, its general meaning is:

"Practical Astronomy; the practical application of Astronomy as an art to human uses, *esp.* (in later usage) to the prediction of events natural or moral."

The *Dictionary* goes on to distinguish:

"(a) *Natural Astrology*: the calculation and foretelling of natural phenomena, as the measurement of time, fixing of Easter, prediction of tides and eclipses: also of meteorological phenomena."

as contrasted with:

"(b) *Judicial Astrology*: the art of judging of the reputed occult and non-physical influences of the stars and planets upon men and affairs; star-divination, astrology."

This, we learn, is the only meaning of "Astrology" since the end of the seventeenth century. Then follows the definition of Judicial Astrology in *Chambers' Encyclopædia* quoted above (p. 15).

## II

What is the history of Astrology? For words, as we saw, get their meanings settled by the use of men in practical life.

Philosophy began, said Plato, in wonder, and the beginning of Astrology lay in the natural wonder of men about the stars. This in ancient Babylon was enhanced by the climate. The dry air of the desert and the great open skies seemed to bring the stars near to the earth. Men mapped out the heavens and used the result of their observations for the measurement of time. The sun obviously guided the course of the year with its regularly recurring seasons. The moon shining at night, waxing and waning, gave the convenient measurements of the month. The stars, circling round the fixed (or nearly fixed) pole-star, guided men as to north, south, east, and west as they travelled over the desert.

They soon noticed that certain stars, as well as the moon, moved differently from the others. They came to be called wandering stars, or planets. They were seven in number and were associated with the days of the week, itself the quarter of the month. Three of them never went far from the sun, and were often engulfed in its light. The other three moved more slowly, but they all passed over the heavens within a certain band known later as the ecliptic. As the months passed one by one, the sun rose in different parts of the sky they had mapped out.

Naturally, and rightly, they tried to find a reason for all this. They saw that the stars moved regularly and tried to find out the rules and reasons that lay behind their motions. They assumed there were laws to be discovered. The stars seemed so near. The sun obviously



influenced the lives of men. They felt there must be a meaning in it all. In this they showed the true scientific spirit which longs to know.

But unfortunately they were Polytheists. They believed in many gods. This prevented their getting the sense of unity that Theism or the belief in one God gives. They made accurate measurements and calculations, but couldn't bring the whole together. Moreover, they believed there were an infinite number of spirits that inhabited the air. They lived in constant fear of their arbitrary and malignant powers. Or else, seeing the regularity of the motion of the stars, they believed in a Fixed Fate, greater even than the gods, against which man and gods alike strove in vain. They connected this with their study of the heavens, and came to believe that: "The stars above us govern our conditions."

Astrology spread to Egypt, where it became still more closely associated with the gods of the land. It spread thence to Greece, where it was still further elaborated as a science. In the fourth century B.C. it seems to have been unknown, though the belief in magic powers of numbers had spread with the teaching of Pythagoras, had attracted Plato, and been ridiculed by Aristotle, who studied nature in the true scientific spirit. From Greece it was carried by the conquests of Alexander to India; from India it travelled to China, getting modified and altered by the beliefs of each land through which it spread.

About the beginning of the Christian era it spread westward. The names of the planets as we know them in astronomy proper or in the days of the week, are those of the Latin gods, which men assumed to be the same as those of Greece, though, of course, they were really as different from them as the gods of Greece were from those

of Egypt and Babylon. The Arabs brought new ideas in their conquests from the seventh to the thirteenth centuries. But all these ideas were purely human inventions and had nothing really to do with the stars.

The best Pagans, of course, ridiculed these ideas of Astrology. Plato steered clear of them. There is nothing of it in Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) Cicero, the interpreter of Greek philosophy to the West, gave it a full and dignified examination in his two books *On Divination* (*De Divinatione*, 45 B.C.). But unfortunately he had nothing but a mere conservative belief in the gods of his fathers and a vague belief in natural religion to oppose to what he condemned; and mere criticism does little to correct error and nothing to show a better way.

The Jews were practically free from the superstitions of Astrology. They may have believed in the existence of the gods of Babylon or not, but, in any case, they were no gods for them. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord," was their creed. The stars were no homes of gods or demons, but just things He had made. "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth His handiwork." The attitude of their prophets towards Astrology can be gathered from the contemptuous words of Isaiah (xlvi, 13):

"Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels; let now the astrologers, the star-gazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up and save thee from the things that shall come upon thee."

Christians inherited the Jewish tradition. Augustine (A.D. 354-430), too, tells a typical story in his 246th letter:

"When one of these astrologers, after selling to wealthy clients his absurd prognostications, calls back his thoughts

from the ivory tablets (in which he inscribes them) to the management of his own house, he reproves his wife, not with words only, but with blows, if he finds her, I do not say jesting too freely, but even looking out of the window. Nevertheless, if she were to expostulate, saying: 'Why beat me; beat Venus rather, if you can, since it is under that planet's influence that I am compelled to do what you complain of,' he would certainly apply his energies, not to invent some absurd jargon by which he cajoles his public, but to inflict some of the just correction by which he maintains his authority at home."

### III

Astrology had a great development in the Middle Ages. The world of thought was beginning to revive after the so-called Dark Ages. Men were making a great attempt at the unification of all knowledge. The belief in one God led them, quite rightly, to seek out the connection of one thing with another, but unfortunately they did not equally study the difference in order of things and realise where things were connected and where independent.

So men applied their theories not only to the influence of the stars in the lives of men, but connected them with all sorts of other things. The different planets were supposed to have to do with different colours, with numbers, with parts of the body, with metals, with medicines. This was easier than observing the stars and yourself casting elaborate horoscopes.

So Astrology became mixed up with alchemy, or, as it came later to be called, with chemistry. It became

involved in medicine, and surgeons avoided operations when the stars were in certain positions in the sky. Jewish speculations entered into it from the Kabbala, a term which had come to be applied "to hidden and mysterious doctrines dealing with the nature of the Deity and His relation to the world". It came to be more and more applied to individuals and their fortunes, and less, perhaps, to those of governments and kings. It was widespread even till the end of the sixteenth century. The great astronomer Kepler himself believed "that his discoveries supplied the key to all events of history, and exalted Astrology to the level of a perfect and independent science of simple calculation, while in reality he had given the death-blow to its pretensions".

For the gradual separation of Astronomy from Astrology showed up the absurdity of the latter. Isidore of Seville (*ob.* 630) was one of the first to distinguish the one from the other. The science began to be distinguished from the art. Astronomy recorded what the stars really did and left the question of their supposed influence on men to Astrology. *Natural Astrology* as Astronomy began to be distinguished from *Judicial Astrology* or fortune telling.

Protests against the assumptions of Astrology became more frequent. Religious reformers, like Savonarola, denounced it. Men like the great French mathematician Pascal studied the laws of probability, and he, with his profound understanding of human nature, examined the causes of its prevalence.

The final blow was given when the world accepted the teaching of Copernicus that the sun and stars did not go round the earth, but that the earth, revolving on its own axis, went round the sun. The earth, it was realised, was



itself one of the planets like Jupiter and Mars, bigger than Mars and at our feet, "only" about ninety millions of miles from the sun: while Jupiter was nearly 500 millions of miles away, far off in the frozen distance.

Astrology had been almost universally believed in. In the year 1583, so Strype tells us in his *Annals of the Church* (Bk. I, Ch. xvii), "came abroad a book", the author of which was Lord Henry Howard. A second edition was printed in 1620. There was still a wide call for it. It was called "*A defensative against the poison of supposed prophecies*—not hitherto confuted by the pen of any man. Which", it continued,

"being grounded either upon the warrant or authority of old painted books, exposition of dreams, oracles, revelations, invocations of damned spirits, judicials of astrology, or any other kind of pretended knowledge whatsoever *de futuris contingentibus* have been causes of great disorder in the commonwealth among the simple and unlearned people. Very necessary to be published, considering the great offence which grew by most palpable and gross error in astrology."

A hundred years after such a book was scarcely necessary, at any rate for people who could read. Popular superstition abounded, but Swift set the literary world laughing in his famous practical joke pamphlet *Prediction for the year 1708, by Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq.*, in which he held up to ridicule, as only he could do, the almanac-maker Partridge and his predictions, prophesying, by a parody of a horoscope, that "he will infallibly die upon the 29th of March next, about eleven at night, of a raging fever". When the unfortunate man declared after that date that he was still alive, Swift reproved him for his bad manners, and pretended to discredit his evidence. It

was, perhaps, an ill-natured action, and practical jokes are a poor form of wit, but such a joke would not have been possible a hundred years before.

#### IV

Astrology was killed for thinking people by Astronomy. It is because people will not confine themselves to their own business that trouble comes. Astronomy is an inspiring study in itself and has rendered man inestimable services in practical things. But this is only when it has stuck to its "last" and confined itself to describing material things and finding the laws of motion, of chemical change, of light and heat. When it goes beyond the "shoe" that is its business and begins to seek in the material order the things which belong to persons, purpose, influence, passion, intelligence, will, goodness (or evil), above all, when it joins itself with false ideas about persons, human or divine, with many and false gods instead of the One and True, when, that is, it becomes Astrology, then the results are disastrous.

Let us see what some of these are.

## CHAPTER III

### *Astrology and Astronomy*

“*Lesilence éternel de ces espaces infinis m’effraie*”  
(*The eternal silence of these great spaces fills me  
with fear*)—PASCAL, *Pensées*, No. 206.

LET us examine a few of the chief features of Astrology. Let us see what the ancient star-gazers found out; let us see what they built upon their discoveries by ideas of their own; let us see how their theories which have lasted till to-day are affected by the scientific study of Astronomy.

#### I

The Babylonians of old noticed that while the mass of stars remained in their places, rising and setting night after night, there were some, and those among the brightest, that moved irregularly. They went forward in their usually direct path, wandering among the others, but sometimes even going backwards and tracing a sort of loop. These came to be called planets, from the Greek word for “to wander”.

Of these they noticed that two never moved far from the sun. Sometimes they were evening stars, then they would disappear in the sun’s light and after a time reappear as morning stars. These are the planets we now call Mercury and Venus. Three others, now known as Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, moved about much more

freely, and as a rule shone brightly all through the night. We now know the reason of this. The Earth, too, is a planet. We on our globe move round the sun in a slightly irregular circle. Mercury and Venus move in a smaller circle nearer the sun, and so, to us, never seem far away from it. Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn move in much greater circles round the sun at a far greater distance. All shine by light reflected from the sun.

But the Babylonian astrologers identified these with gods, or at least regarded them as their homes, from which they influenced men. The sun, as the source of light and heat, which marks off the days and seasons and makes plants grow and the harvests ripen, was naturally regarded as the chief, and was identified with the god Shamash.

There was some tendency to regard the moon as his wife, since the moon seemed to be next in importance, marking out the months and the weeks, but generally Venus, always near the sun, was regarded as the female deity, and Mercury, appearing and disappearing, was regarded as their wayward child. These three formed a family, over against which was the opposing, even hostile, trio of Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn.

As the sun's family was regarded as friendly, there was a tendency to regard these as evil. Mars was held to be youthful, turbulent, warlike, and revolutionary. Jupiter as king was perhaps good, but kings are often tyrants to be feared. Saturn was the hoary-headed begetter of evil. The sun, Jupiter, and Saturn were propitious by day, Mars and Venus by night.

These names are, of course, Latin names which have come to us from the later Western astronomy of the Middle Ages. Originally it was the Babylonian gods



with which the planets were associated—the sun with Shamash, the moon with Sin, Jupiter with Marduk, Venus with Ishtar, Saturn with Ninib, Mercury with Nebo, and Mars with Nergal. The Greeks substituted the gods of their Olympus which seemed most like them, and the Romans did the same with their selection from these gods, as our ancestors in turn substituted Thor, Wodin, and Freya for the Latin deities which gave the titles of the different days of the week.

But before you could tell how these gods influenced the course of things on the earth there were other things to be reckoned with. The astrologers noticed that these planets, like the sun and moon, never wandered out of a certain path in the sky which passed through a broad band of the stars, but only included part of them. Sometimes, on passing through this plane or band, the moon gets between us and the sun and causes an eclipse, so they called the area where this might happen the ecliptic. The definition of ecliptic in the *Oxford Dictionary* is:

“The great circle of the celestial sphere which is the apparent orbit of the sun. So called because eclipses can happen only when the moon is on, or very near, this line. Sometimes put for the plane of the ecliptic.”

For convenience of calculation they divided this band into twelve compartments with certain fixed stars in each, and each of these “houses” as they were called were given presiding deities. There were several different arrangements, but as time went on they settled down into our present signs of the zodiac, apportioned to the different months: Aries the Ram, Taurus the Bull, Gemini the Twins, Cancer the Crab, Leo the Lion, Virgo the Virgin, Libra the Balance, Scorpio the Scorpion,

Sagittarius the Archer, Capricornus the Goat, Aquarius the Water-carrier, and Pisces the Fishes.

Each planet was given two "houses", which modified its influence while it was in them. It might be increased by conjunction with the groups of stars in them or hindered when in opposition. The "Ascendant" was the particular point of this ecliptic of the zodiac which at any moment, as e.g. at the birth of a child, was just rising in the East. As this varied in different countries—earlier in the East and later in the West—the point was extended five degrees of the zodiac above and twenty-five below it. The "Lord of the Ascendant" was any planet within the "House of the Ascendant". "The Ascendant and its lord," the *Dictionary* tells us, "were supposed to exercise a special influence upon the life of the child then born."

The mapping-out the positions of the planets in their various houses with their fixed stars moving with the zodiac and the calculating their supposed combined influence on a person at the moment of birth was called casting a horoscope. The Greek astrologers gave particular attention to these horoscopes and the word is a Greek one. *Horos* means time, and *scopos* an observer.

The *Oxford Dictionary* gives as its definition:

"An observation of the sky and the configuration of the planets at a certain moment, as for instance at the instant of a person's birth, hence a plan or scheme of the twelve houses, or twelve signs of the zodiac, showing the disposition of the heavens at a particular moment."

And to "cast a horoscope" is:

"to calculate the degree of the ecliptic which is on the eastern horizon at a given moment, e.g. at the birth of a child, and thence to erect an astrological figure of the

heavens, so as to discover the influence of planets upon his life and fortunes.”

These three, the planets and their influence, the zodiac in the plane of the ecliptic, and its twelve houses, the fixed stars with their influence, and the putting them together in casting horoscopes, are the foundation of Astrology.

On this other factors were based. The planets were connected with metals, the sun with gold, the moon with silver, Mercury with quicksilver—we still call it mercury—Jupiter with tin, Venus with copper, and Saturn with lead. The motion of the sun through the seven houses was mapped out in a square of twelve triangles, a method still adopted, though, of course, a band round the earth is circular and it divides naturally into bulging or convex squares. The sixth house was the house of pain, the eighth of death, the tenth, because it came at the top of the square, that of dignities and offices, the fourth, being at the bottom, that of parents and ancestors, the twelfth signified enmity, so the eleventh had to imply friendship, and so forth and so forth. The planets were associated with colours—Saturn with grey, Jupiter with white, Mars with red, Venus with yellow, while the colour for Mercury varied. Lucky numbers and colours are still given in “horoscopes” in the daily Press.

## II

What are we to say to all this? Simply that it is based on no facts, but entirely on human imagination. Even if the Babylonian astrologers had been right in associating the planets with Marduk and Ishtar and the rest, the

Egyptian and Greek star-gazers had an entirely different set of gods, and many others whose influence ought to have been accounted for. The Egyptian deities were to a great extent nature gods. The gods of Greece were the anthropomorphic warrior gods of Homer. The Roman gods were vague abstractions with hardly any personality at all, or any activity apart from the one special thing they were supposed to do. There was a sort of assimilation of one to another, but Marduk in Babylon, Zeus at Athens, and Jupiter at Rome, were only superficially alike. In most points they were quite different. In any case, no one believes in them now. Yet on their supposed existence, and fancied connection with a few planets, the whole of the "ancient science" of Astrology is based.

The division of the plane of the ecliptic into "houses" is equally arbitrary. Useful it is, no doubt, for mapping out the position of the planets and locating the constellations. But it has no existence outside the minds of men and the maps on which they chart their observations. Things in the sky do not come to a sudden stop because men on earth draw lines like those of latitude and longitude in our atlases.

Again, to believe that birth settles, if not all, at least so much irrevocably, is pure superstition, and is contradicted by facts. Long ago people noticed that twins "born under the same star" are very unlike in life and fortune. What similarities there are between them are far more reasonably explained by heredity, the bent they get from their parents, and by environment, the things closely surrounding them in early life, than by any star or conjunction of stars millions of miles away. The moment of birth does not settle all. Man has a whole



lifetime to exercise his will on the world around him and the men in it. He can take arms against a sea of troubles and, by opposing, end them. There are enough influences to contend with in living men around him and in the material circumstances of this world, without seeking imaginary ones from dead material things in the sky.

So with the belief in lucky and unlucky numbers, which is associated with Astrology. Numbers are abstract ideas drawn in our minds from what we notice of things around us. They have no existence by themselves, but only in some intelligence that counts them. Days naturally group themselves by sevens in a week. After six days' work we need a day of rest and change, but that is because man works rhythmically. It is true that the laws of Astronomy work by number and measure, but that is because God, as Plato put it long ago, "is a geometrician". He works by strict laws in the material things of His own creation, but unless you believe that He is a sort of bully playing practical jokes on us by giving numbers secret powers, you cannot believe in lucky and unlucky numbers.

It is true that men have seemed to find certain character in different numbers. The natural rhythm of the week has seemed to suggest that the number seven has peculiar powers. Men have noticed that there were seven stars in the Great Bear or Charles's Wain. They told of the Seven Sages of Greece. They have counted Seven Sacraments and preached upon the Seven Deadly Sins. They have sung of the Seven Joys of our Lord's Mother, and the Seven Liberal Arts, the Trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and the Quadrivium (arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy). They have deduced from this that twice seven, or fourteen, is doubly lucky, and that the failure

to reach this in thirteen is unlucky, especially as there were twelve faithful apostles and Judas the thirteenth (though at the time he was the twelfth) betrayed our Lord, and so they object to be put in Room No. 13 at hotels.

Whereas, of course, this choosing of seven is merely human. Astronomers could equally easily include a few more stars in their delineation of the Great Bear. There were many philosophers in Greece. The Seven Sacraments and the Seven Deadly Sins were differently made up at different times, and those finally discarded could equally well have been kept in to make the number eight, or nine, or any number you like. The Seven Joys of the Blessed Virgin were enough for the carol; they were reduced to five for the rosary, since it took longer to tell ten beads than to sing a verse with a refrain. Every school-boy who goes in for the School Certificate Examination knows that nowadays there are a great deal more than seven "subjects" to choose from.

Much of this was pointed out more than two thousand years ago by Aristotle, who would stand no nonsense. Pythagoras had started the theory that numbers had each a special character and influence. In the fourteenth Book of his *Metaphysics* (as it is now called) he wrote:

"These, then, are the results of the theory, and yet many more might be brought together. The fact that our opponents have much trouble with the generations of numbers, and can in no way make a system of them, seems to indicate that the objects of mathematics are not separable from things we can touch and feel and that they are not first principles."

And yet the astrologer this morning in the daily paper told us what were our lucky numbers for the day!

## III

Astrology has been killed for thinking people by Astronomy. It was built up in the ancient world on the assumption that there were five planets—Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn which, with the moon and the sun, made seven. Those were all that could be seen with the naked eye.

But in 1781 another planet was discovered by Herschel. It is much bigger than the earth, which at the equator is 7,927 miles thick. Its equatorial diameter is no less than 30,900 miles. But it is so far from the sun, round which it circles—1,782 millions of miles—while we are only 93 millions from it, that when we are nearest to it it is nearly 1,700 millions of miles away, and we cannot see it without a telescope. This is now taken account of by astrologers, but I do not know what influence it is supposed to have. It is called Uranus. Now Uranus was a Latinised Greek god, a son of Kronos or Saturn; as he was told that he would be deposed by one of his own children he ate them up as soon as they were born. When Zeus (identified with Jupiter) appeared on the scene, however, his mother gave Kronos a stone to swallow instead. Zeus, or Jupiter, when he grew up gave him an emetic which compelled him to disgorge both the stone and the other children, and, after a ten years war, killed him. The taking of Uranus into the scheme of Astrology must have seriously interfered with the influence of the planet Jupiter, and upset previous calculations. Herschel proposed to call the star after George the Third, in whose reign he discovered it, but the title *Georgium Sidus* did not “catch on”. The astrological influences of that well-meaning but rather inefficient monarch would not have

been very helpful, but it might perhaps have saved trouble with the planet Jupiter.

That is not all. The movements of Uranus (like those of its name-giver) were found to be irregular. This pointed to an influence still further off. The astronomers made their calculations, turned their telescopes to the right place, and in the year 1845 another planet was found, to which the name of Neptune, the god of the seas, was assigned. It is a little bigger than Uranus, being 33,000 miles in diameter, but it is 2,793 million miles away and takes 164.79 years to go round the sun. In 1930 yet another planet was found by means of telescopic photography. It has been called after Pluto, the god of the underworld. It is 3,666 million miles from the sun and its year is 247.70 times as long as ours. Its size has, so far, not been estimated. These discoveries and the realisation that our earth is one of the planets going round the sun like them, raise serious difficulties for astrologers. Was the old science which knew nothing of these distant planets all wrong? If it was, the whole basis of their modern science is discredited. Or were they so far away that they didn't count? If so, the earth on which we live is so near us and looms so much larger in our sight that, in comparison with it, even the sun, to say nothing of the old five planets, may be ignored. In either case the bottom of Astrology is knocked out. For it could hardly be argued that the influence of the stars entirely depended on men's knowing about them and giving them this or that name.

Still more wonderful discoveries have been made by modern Astronomy about the fixed stars and constellations in the "houses" of the zodiac. Their distances from the earth have been measured. The nearest of these



is 25,300,000,000,000 or twenty-five billion, three hundred thousand million miles away. The distance of the sun from us is only 93 million miles. It takes the light from this star nearly four years and four months to reach us. We never see this star (or any other star) where it actually is, but where it was four years ago; a fact which must entirely upset the astrologers' calculations.

These distances are so great that it is simpler to count by the years it takes the light to reach us than to work out the figures of the miles. One "light year" equals 5,880,000,000,000,000, five thousand, eight hundred and eighty billion miles. The brightest of the stars, Sirius, is nearly nine of these light years away. To simplify matters, astronomers have invented a new word for three and a quarter light years. They call it a "parsec". The nearest star, called *Proxima Centauri*, is 1.3 parsecs, or 4.3 light years, away.

That is not all. Most of the groups of stars to which we have given names are chance collections of stars which have nothing to do with one another. They merely happen to be in the same line of sight to us on earth. Seen from one of the stars composing them, the others would be in groups of quite different constellations. The nearest stars, of which our sun is one, are grouped in a limited, though vast, mass whose shape has been compared to a huge bun or a biscuit. We are somewhere in the middle of it. The others form what is known as the Milky Way in the sky, the great cloud-like ring we can see running from north to south. A group formed like this is called a galaxy. Ours forms a definite island of stars surrounded by outer space.

But in this outer space there are other galaxies. They have been photographed and look like clouds; but some,

such as the two Magellanic clouds, can be seen with the naked eye. The larger of these is 35,000 parsecs away; the smaller, 32,000. There are also what are known as nebulae, of which about 200 are known and have been photographed. They are "shells of gas illuminated by stars in the middle"—galaxies in the making. The nearest is "only" twenty-five parsecs away. Others of these galactic nebulae are irregular clouds of gas. You can see one in the constellation Orion on a winter night which is three parsecs across. It has, apparently, enough matter to build 10,000 suns. The nebula in Andromeda is still further off. It is a colossal congregation of stars, a galaxy in itself, though it looks to us like a single star. It is 270,000 parsecs away, that is 5,130,000,000,000,000,000—or five million, one hundred and thirty thousand billion miles away, and it is the nearest of these galactic nebulae.

So a new word has had to be invented—"megaparsec". A megaparsec is a million parsecs. This Andromeda nebulae is only a little more than a quarter of a megaparsec away, but its light, which travels at 186,000 miles a second, takes 880,000 years to cover the course. What we see started to come to us all those years ago.

To come back from Astronomy to Astrology. Either distance weakens the supposed influence of the stars or it does not. If it does, the constellations of the zodiac can have no influence at all on the lives of men. They are made up of nebulae and galaxies too far off for even the biggest to have any influence upon our lives. If it does not, the influence of these countless bodies would be overwhelming, which it is not, unless we are to suppose that as independent and mutually conflicting bodies, all

influencing in their own way, they cancel one another out and destroy one another's influence before it reaches us. In either case they do not count.

## IV

These wonderful discoveries have been made by Astronomy. There are many others. It has found out a great deal about what the stars are made of. By examining and breaking up the light that comes from them they know that certain metals exist in them in a state of gas from the heat, as water boils and turns to steam on earth. It has found out stars that may be called young and others that are growing old. It is probable that there are many that are dead. It has estimated what they weigh. It has discovered that they are moving this way and that. But all these are discoveries about material things, about things that can be measured. No sign has been found that they have any personal life of their own, no sign of any peculiar spiritual indwelling, no sign that they have any moral influence over the characters and lives of men.

In other words, Astronomy kills Astrology.

## CHAPTER IV

### *The Practical Cure for Astrology*

*“For that sevenfold order of studies was led on by philosophers even to the stars, so that it delivered men’s minds in bondage to worldly wisdom from the things of this earth, and gathered them together in contemplation of the things that are above”*—ST. ISIDORE OF SEVILLE, *Etymologiarum* “*De Astronomia*”, Bk. III, Ch. lxxi, § 40.

ASTROLOGY makes a great show of scientific method, but its results are distressingly vague. Now and then it scores a hit, but as a rule it gives us no sure guidance. Most of these successes are published after the event, but, for scientific results, all the failures also should be collected and conclusions drawn from the evidence taken as a whole.

#### I

A large number of its conclusions are published in the form of prophetic pictures, with or without comments. Strange figures are drawn passing over the scene; in the background are symbolic objects, falling towers, lightning, clouds, pyramids and temples, “sea sarpints and comets which light up the sky”. Predictions are made that there will be earthquakes in the east and storms at sea, that there will be labour unrest in England and political changes in South America. But all these are



safe utterances if you do not go too much into particulars. The odds are heavy in their favour. They are sure to be true, stars or no stars, somewhere or other. Similarly, the advice given day by day to individuals in the daily Press is equally cautious and indecisive. The following was the advice given to me on three quite uneventful days in December 1940, when I was preparing this little book. Owing to the influence of Mars, I was warned:

Thur. Dec. 19. Don't let prejudice spoil a promising friendship.

Fri. Dec. 20. Person most closely connected with you has a busy time. Your own plans put on one side to help.

Sat. Dec. 21. Morning excellent for most schemes, but especially for new ventures.

It would have been the same if I had been born on any of the next twenty-six days, but if I had been born two days earlier the advice, owing to the influence of Venus, would have been:

Thur. Dec. 19. Somebody makes an error of judgment. Your plans suffer in consequence.

Fri. Dec. 20. Good chance to clear up existing muddles.

Sat. Dec. 21. Prepare to enjoy yourself this week-end.

Now, all this is excellent and safe counsel, but it is difficult to believe that the learned astrologer could not have done equally well off his own bat without taking all the trouble we must believe he did in consulting the planets Mars and Venus for their rather commonplace advice.

When predictions are more detailed they seem more often than not to be definitely wrong, but the prognosticators can rely on the successes being noticed and the failures attracting no attention. Thus, to quote Mr. Balleine's pamphlet, *What is Superstition?* once more

(p. 11). After detailing how one astrologer after another gave the most propitious foretellings of the coronation of King Edward VII, he continues:

“Here are five other predictions, made for 1937, not one of which was fulfilled: ‘More than one famous English bank will crash’ (*Raphael*). ‘There will be a move away from Dictatorship, and a reconstituted League of Nations will exercise its strengthened authority with firmness’ (*Old Moore*). ‘Before March 21 a woman is to become a member of the Cabinet’ (*Old Moore*). ‘Some form of plague, probably quite an unfamiliar form, will appear in the British Isles. London will be the chief centre of infection’ (*Naylor*). ‘An amazing scientific discovery, which reduces present fighting forces to a farce, will be made. I am not quite sure which Power is going to hold this key of life and death. It may be Russia, Japan or Australia’ (*Raphael*).”

But the predictions of our modern astrologers are not confined to these vague foreshadowings spread over a year or even to the monthly influence of the planets on persons born in rigidly defined months. They also give “general interpretations” (for all birthdays) which anyone can get thrown in for nothing on the advertisement page of a sevenpenny monthly magazine.

Of course, if you don't like the advice in any one paper you can always buy another with its different set of recommendations. It would be an interesting experiment to answer two different advertisements of these learned men who will cast your horoscope for half a crown and compare the results, but I am afraid I have never tried the experiment myself.

## II

The wide spread of these and other superstitions reveals a serious state of things to-day. But little is done by merely exposing folly, and people are not converted by ridicule. What we have got to do is to find out why they are so silly and what is the best cure.

The first thing, then, is to get people to learn a little elementary *Astronomy*; to realise what the stars really are; to understand how they move and what they are made of; why they shine and what is the nature of light. They should read of the discoveries that have been made, and see how they were won by observation and experiment.

They will then realise how there are laws of Nature and that material things by themselves only have material results. The sun sends heat, light, and energy to the world, but nothing else. The moon attracts the seas and causes the tides. It reflects the sun's light by night, but has no other influence. The stars send light, but so little that they do not materially count.

The next thing is to study men and get a few simple ideas of *Psychology*. We must study why men believe things and how they should reason. We have seen above an example of this when we asked why men credit prophecies based on the movements of material objects which cannot see or understand what is coming in the future. We saw that it was because they notice exceptional things—like the lucky shots of fortune tellers—and take the normal—like their failures—for granted. The laws of logic and of fallacies in reasoning when studied will help us to understand why men believe things, as they do, without any real evidence.

We should study, too, the question of the relations of *Mind* to *Matter*, to see how far material things do really influence our thoughts and how much farther our thoughts go in interpreting material things and subduing them to our service. We should learn to see that while material circumstances *condition* our lives they do not *determine* them absolutely. We should get it clear that while circumstances do influence us, it is character that decides the issues and chooses, and masters, surroundings.

But the last and chief thing is to study things supernatural, the laws of God, and what we mean by God; in other words, the study of *Theology*, the science of God.

Astrology is based on the old belief in many gods, in Polytheism. The ancient world believed in a whole host of deities and spirits, friendly and hostile, capricious and changeable, and often warring with one another. It tried to escape these, to flatter those, to find out which were the strongest and to appease them. Long before Astronomy destroyed Astrology by showing what the earth and the stars really were, it was practically undermined by belief in one God, and He a God of Righteousness and Love.

As long as men believed in many gods all Science was impossible. There was no idea of unity in creation, no conception of universal laws. You could never tell what would happen next. You lived in constant terror and fear, and spent endless time and trouble in trying to find out what these different gods were going to do. The Greek philosophers, with their speculative belief in one divine principle, were not taken in by Astrology. The Jews, with their practical trust in Jehovah, laughed at it.



The Christian Church led the way to distinguishing Astronomy from Astrology. So to-day the most powerful corrective of superstition or regarding things “with a zealous or fearful but erroneous relation to God” lies in a right belief about God.



## PART II

# PREDICTION

## CHAPTER I

### *Prediction To-day*

*“Nothing is ‘certain to happen’ which there is some means of dealing with so as to prevent its happening”*—CICERO, *On Divination*, Bk. II, Ch. viii, 21.

MEN have always wanted to know the Future. In old days they consulted oracles and listened to the predictions of prophets and augurs, wizards and witches. They looked for omens in the flight of birds. They sacrificed animals and examined their entrails. They interpreted dreams and believed in lucky numbers. They tried to develop occult powers. They cast horoscopes and consulted the stars.

And they have always been disappointed. Cato declared that one augur could not meet another without a smile of derision. Cicero seriously considered the arguments for and against Divination and summed up against Prediction. Epicureans like Horace declared it was no use to seek to know the Future and counselled the enjoyment of the Present as the better course.

So it is still to-day. The Present Age is no exception, and for a very simple reason. The Future does not exist yet, and therefore cannot be told. The Future is not yet fixed, for it depends on the doings of men, and man has

Free Will to do or not to do. He can alter things in the Future for good and for ill. There is no such thing as Fixed Fate and no Science of Prediction. This is a sufficient answer to all the many forms of superstition that pretend to tell what is to come.

## I

All things concerning Man, that is. There is much that is fixed in the lower order of Nature. Material things act by fixed laws of cause and effect, unless living and reasoning beings interfere with them. We cannot alter the course of the moon, so its phases can be dated in our almanacks. We cannot influence the sun, so eclipses can be foretold to the second. We can be certain that the sun will rise to-morrow and at a certain time, that "summer and winter, seed time and harvest, will not fail"—practically certain that is, for we assume that the higher personal power of God will not interfere with the laws He has ordained and work miracles, since it is best for us to live our lives against a fixed background of material things.

Man cannot alter the Laws of Nature, but his reactions to them he can, and does, vary. He can sow his seed and reap his harvest, or he can fail to do so. He can control the laws this way or that. You can foretell what will happen if he does the one or the other, but you cannot say which he will do. They need continual guidance, and he must exert continual energy to guide them. We can foresee what will happen if he neglects his work or chooses the wrong course.

Above all, God disposes. He, we believe, works with a purpose and sometimes, no doubt, overrules our efforts.



We can find out from His revelation of Himself what He will do. But if He has fixed the *principles* on which He always works and does not change, He has not fixed the *application* of them in detail. That depends on man's use of the Free Will he has had given him. If man does wrong and repents, He may, to use human language, also "repent". And, in any case, man's reaction to God's ordering remains with man himself. He may accept or rebel. He may co-operate, or refuse to obey in his heart.

Moreover, we know this, not by argument, but by direct knowledge. As old Dr. Johnson said, "All theory is against the freedom of the will (here, I think, he overstated the case); all experience is for it" (here he was undoubtedly right). As I pen these lines I know perfectly well that I can stop if I like, that I can alter my words, that I am responsible for what I write, and you who are reading them know you can leave off if you choose, and no amount of argument will make you believe otherwise. "Sir," he said, "we *know* our wills are free and *there's* an end on't."

Now this simple fact cuts away the ground from all superstitions about the future. It wipes out the social theory of Marxism that each man is what he is solely because of his surrounding material, economic conditions. Spiritualists are constantly on the verge of fortune telling, though the better type of psychic investigators deprecate any such thing. Freudian interpreters of dreams, who say that they arise from a subconsciousness that entirely governs our lives, are put out of court. The whole tribe of less reputable soothsayers, crystal-gazers, palmists, card-layers, purveyors of lucky charms which enable you to spot winners and rob your neighbours who have not got one, interpreters of dreams, or of lucky or unlucky

portents, who repeat the superstitions of the ancient pagan world, all have a common ground of belief in predictions of a fixed future, and owe their chief interest to endeavour to discover a future fate which does not exist if man has, as he knows he has, Free Will.

But there is another class of seekers after predictions. It consists of good people whom we are loath to laugh at, men and women who are sincerely religious and find a support, so they think, for their belief of predestination in their religion and in their belief in God and His Will. There is so much they hold that we hold also—belief in God, recognition of Christ as the Revealer of God upon earth, the moral law of right and wrong, the duties of practical love for our fellow men, the purpose of God in the salvation of all men.

But we feel they are being drawn away from the real essence of Christianity, that their special theories are unfounded or one-sided, that they are making Christianity ridiculous in the eyes of ordinary sensible men, that they are playing into the hands of secularists who find them an easy target for their strictures.

## II

There are many of these. Let us take three typical examples. Most of us have heard of the British Israelites. We have noticed how, from time to time, they can fill a whole sheet of *The Times* with an advertisement of their tenets. They must, we think, be many in number. Certainly they are rich if they can afford to pay for such publicity. Possibly we have friends, men whom we respect, men who have served their country in the past, who are British Israelites.

Their theory is that Israelites and Jews are not the same. The Jews, they say, were the Israelites of the tribe of Judah and of the Southern Kingdom, while the "lost tribes" were not lost, but carried away, first of all, to Nineveh. Thence, they declare, they travelled through Russia and Scythia, after that to Scandinavia, and finally to Britain; and we, they say—the inhabitants of the British Isles, and our cousins in America—are their descendants and the inheritors of the Covenant made with the original people.

They sometimes point to the survival of names to substantiate their theory. The Hebrew word for "Covenant" is *B'rith* and for "Man" is *Ish*, so *B'rit-ish* means the Covenant Man. The Welsh, or Cymri as they call themselves, are the same as the Cimmerians mentioned by Herodotus. The word "Saxon" suggests Isaac's sons. But their chief reliance is on prophecies in the Old Testament. The Israelites are promised that they will "possess the gate of their enemies" (Gen. xxii, 17 and xxiv, 60), and the English are, or were, in possession of Gibraltar, Malta, Heligoland, Aden, and Singapore. They are intensely loyal and bitter opponents both of Nazi National Socialism and Bolshevik Communism.

Further, they find independent support for their interpretation of the Old Testament in the Great Pyramid of Egypt, which, standing there mysteriously near the Sphinx in the desert as it has stood for ages, has always filled men's minds with awe and wonder as to its purpose and meaning. By various measurements of its interior, only explored in recent years, they find prophecies of events taking place in our days and of predictions being fulfilled.

England, they say, like Israel of old, is called to a great task in the world's history. She, or rather Britain, with

her Dominions and Colonies, is destined to conquer and rule the world of the modern Gentiles, and to rule in righteousness according to God's Covenant with men. British Israelitism seems to make a special appeal to old army men.

### III

Most of us, at any rate of those of us who live in cities have from time to time seen great posters announcing a mission to make known the coming of a "Millennial Dawn". On one side is a large portrait of a very American-looking Pastor Russell. Across it is written in great letters "Millions now living will never die". Crowded meetings are held in support of the doctrine as to the events to come in the near future.

*Millennial Dawn* is the title of a series of books, the first of which was published in 1886. Its author was Charles Taze Russell, of Allegheny, Pennsylvania. He was born in 1852, and he tells us that he was a member of a Congregational church but became dissatisfied with "orthodoxy". The word should mean "right belief", but in his case meant the Calvinism of the old-fashioned independents, which declared that God had predestined the vast majority of men to everlasting torture for no fault of their own. He calculated that the number of these must be some 142 billions. He was sure that they must at least have another chance, and so, instead of rejecting the Bible altogether as he was tempted to do, turned to it and found there no support for the dreadful teaching he had been brought up in.

So he worked out what he called a *Plan of the Ages*, which he supported at great length with numbers of Bible



references. There were to be three ages, the first from the Creation to the Flood; the next that of the Patriarchs, the Jewish Dispensation, and the Gospel Times; the third the Times of the Fullness of Christ, leading up to the Millennium which was dawning as he wrote.

In each a larger proportion of men were to be saved than in that which went before, as shown by a pyramid gradually rising above a line. Men were to be given one more chance, which many would take, and the rest were to be annihilated. It was a message full of hope and charity compared with that which he rejected. It had already begun, he declared, in 1874, and he promised more volumes, the second of which appeared in 1888. The first volume had in 1910 sold to the number of 2,684,500 copies, and his disciples have shown great activity in distributing the work.

There have been many other movements of a similar type, especially in America, and we are constantly hearing of new ones. Their common feature is the expectation of an immediate coming of Christ to judge the world and to set up the Millennium. Their teaching is, as a rule, chiefly based on Old Testament prophecies and on the last book of the Bible, the Revelation of St. John the Divine.

Pastor Russell died in 1916 after organising (*Zion's Watchtower Tract Society* for Pennsylvania in 1884 and for New York State in 1904. In 1914 he had organised the *International Bible Students' Association*. After his death the work was continued and developed largely by the work of "Judge" or Brother J. S. Rutherford and others, though many of the followers of Pastor Russell did not follow them. They preached the Establishment of the "Theocratic Government", to which, as "Jehovah's

Witnesses'', they testified. It was to be finally set up after the great battle of Armageddon spoken of in Revelations xvi, 16, which Christ would come in visible presence to win, and in which all Jehovah's enemies would be destroyed. The literature of the movement, translated into various languages, owing to its diligent distribution by the "Witnesses" in all lands, has been enormous.

## IV

Then there are others whom we may call *Second Adventists*. They have generally not formed separate bodies, but remain loyal, practising members of one or other of the older religious organisations. They form a school within them rather than a movement from them.

They argue that Christ promised to come again and set up a kingdom on earth. They have no difficulty in finding texts in the New Testament to warrant their belief that from the earliest times His coming was expected to be soon.

They quote the words of Christ Himself, such as Mark xiii, 26: "Then shall they see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and great glory"; and Acts i, 9, 11, when "A cloud received him out of their sight," "This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven," which represent the earliest traditions of the Gospels. They refer to 1 Thessalonians iv, 16, written about the year 50, "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout" or 2 Peter iii, 4, perhaps the latest book in the New Testament except the fourth Gospel, in which "scoffers", who said "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep

all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation," were reminded (v. 8) that "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day."

With them there is less picking and choosing of special texts, less reliance on apocalyptic imagery. They read their Bible as a whole and lay chief stress on the promises of the prophets that the Messiah will come and reign on earth and little on the note of personal reward or gain for themselves.

Moreover, if there is less working out of this hope in detail, they have a real personal devotion to Christ, such as is expressed in such hymns as Charles Wesley's "Jesu, lover of my soul". We have all come across such people and know what a powerful influence they exert both within the Church and in the world without.

## V

But, different as these three classes are, they all agree in believing that the future is predicted, and that not merely in broad outlines dependent on men's actions, but in more or less (and generally more than less) definite details. If they, too, like the vulgar fortune-telling charlatans with which we have contrasted them, have made their predictions so that they imply that the future is fixed to particular dates and in inevitable forms, they are denying man's Free Will, and they are wrong.

It is not a mere matter of speculation. It is very serious if they are on wrong lines.

If such things are put forward as the only way in religion, it makes it appear ridiculous and offers an easy target for the secularist to aim at in his attacks.

## CHAPTER II

### *Prediction in History*

*“Men do not assign their real motives, not because they will not, but because they cannot. They cannot analyse their own complex feelings with steadiness and impartiality. To do so is the function of the historian”*—MARK PATTISON, *Essays* (Oxford 1889), “Calvin at Geneva”, Vol. II, p. 2.

IT is always useful to study the past. History puts things into perspective. In the present we are surrounded by so many things that we cannot view them as a whole. We are biased by personal likes and dislikes. We exaggerate the importance of things near us. We “cannot see the wood for the trees”.

#### I

Prediction is no new thing in the world. It was rife in the ancient days of Greece and Rome, in Old Testament times, and through the ages that the Church has been on earth. In all these three eras it has been in discredit. From all three we can learn much.

In ancient days the Temple at Delphi was the meeting-point for the religious life of the Greeks with their various gods, as the stadium at Olympus was for their common interest in athletics and games. There they laid their differences aside for the time and became one people.



There seems to have been a chasm in the rock that poured forth stupefying fumes which sent the oracle there—at one time there were three of them—into a sort of trance, in which she was believed to be controlled by the god and to utter his message to those who came to consult him. Over the gates of the temple were the two wise sayings which characterised Greek Philosophy and Greek Art, which, within their limits, have never been surpassed to this day. They were *Gnothi Seauton* and *Meden Agan*—"Know thyself" and "Nothing extreme".

Many tales were told of the words of the oracle. There was the declaration to Socrates that he was the wisest man on earth, which astounded him, till he found that others were as ignorant as himself but that he alone seemed to know his own ignorance. In a later story it declared that Athens would be "saved by running", which, as it seemed to counsel flight before the Persian invader, was ignored till, after the victory of Marathon was won, Pheidippides outstripped all the others in running back to Athens with the news in time to stop the treachery of the Fifth Columnists within her walls, shouting *Chairete Nikomen*, "Rejoice, we conquer", and, falling exhausted, breathed his last. But the essence of all the famous sayings, of those at least which were remembered as proving to be true predictions, was that they were ambiguous, that they could be interpreted in another way if the first interpretation proved untrue.

Rome, too, had her *Sibylline Books* to guide the policy of the city. But they needed an official interpreter, and men, Plutarch tells us, kept on complaining that things were not what they used to be in the good old days. They were finding the oracles misleading and were ceasing to consult them.

In the army augurs were consulted who watched the flight of birds and drew conclusions from the way they went as to whether it was wise or unwise to join issue with the enemy. Before engaging in battle, animals were sacrificed and their entrails examined for signs which would tell what was fated to happen.

But there are early records of impatience with such nonsense. Suetonius tells the story of Claudius Pulcher, who began a sea fight off Sicily, "though the sacred chickens would not eat when he took the auspices, throwing them into the sea when he defied the omen, and saying that they might drink since they would not eat".

"But the joke," says Cicero in his book *On the Nature of the Gods*, "cost the jester himself many tears and the Roman people a great disaster, for the fleet was seriously defeated." So the augurs found a better way to get good omens which they called "forced" auspices. They kept the sacred chickens in their cage without feeding them, so that they would be sure to eat greedily, and so bring good luck.

How terribly rife superstition about the future was in those days among the mass of the people, and how closely it was bound up with their traditional religion, we can learn from Cicero and his book, *De Divinatione*—"On Divination".

He lived in the generation just before the birth of Christ. He had been banished out of the practice of the law courts and out, as he thought, of politics. Now he was back again at his country villa at Tusculum among his friends, and he turned to Philosophy. He wanted to bring Greek learning and culture to his own people and to show them that the Latin tongue he loved so dearly, and in the use of which he had won such fame, was as

apt for thought as that of Greece. He had finished his book *On the Nature of the Gods*, but Roman religion was so bound up with augury and divining the future that he felt he must go thoroughly into this question of Prediction. He saw its connection with Free Will and was going presently to write a book *On Fate*, but alas! his augury which he half-heartedly defended as bound up with Roman history, though it had predicted his recall from banishment, could not warn him that within a very few years he was to be "liquidated" by the "purge" of the Second Triumvirate.

Lawyer-like he puts the case for the defence of Divination into the mouth of his brother Quintus, who gives arguments and examples which show that the world of that day was not so very different from that of ours. I pass over his references to Astrology and the stars, of which I have already written. We find stories of dreams successfully interpreted, how Cicero himself had dreamed that he was wandering about till Gaius Marius led him in safety to a temple, saying, "A speedy and glorious return awaits you", which the interpreter, quite in the spirit of the modern dream book, said meant that he was to be recalled from banishment; and, sure enough, he had been recalled. He said nothing about his impending "liquidation".

We find, too, stories of successful auspices in the past, though he acknowledges that they seem to be less successful than people used to find them. He tells of mules giving birth to foals; of men catching snakes at home and dying afterwards; of weather forecasts proving true—"So why shouldn't other prophecies be true also?" of dying men prophesying, of abnormally developed powers which most men have lost, of ravens flying to the right,

and crows flying to the left, to foretell success, etc. etc., giving a general impression of a mass of superstition all round, as was natural when men believed in a host of different gods. But even he feels he must draw the line somewhere, and ends up with: "I will assert, however, in conclusion, that I do not recognise fortune tellers, or those who prophesy for money, or necromancers ("the pretended art," according to the *Oxford Dictionary*, "of revealing future events, etc., by means of communications with the dead"), or mediums whom your friend Appius makes it a practice to consult," and he quotes the poet Ennius:

"In fine I say I do not care a fig  
For Maurian augurs, village mountebanks,  
Astrologers who haunt the circus grounds,  
Or Isis seers, or dream interpreters,"

for they are not diviners either by knowledge or skill:

"But superstitious bards, soothsaying quacks,  
Adverse to work or mad, or ruled by want,  
Directing others how to go, and yet  
What road to take they do not know themselves.  
From those to whom they promise wealth they beg  
A coin. From what they promise let them take  
Their coin as toll and pass the balance on."

To all which Cicero replies: "My dear Quintus, you have come admirably prepared," and proceeds to his reply in the second book.

He first narrows the scope of Divination. It is not applicable in any case in which knowledge is gained through the senses, that is, in the ordinary ways. In Astronomy and Mathematics you must go to the Astron-



omer and the Mathematician; in Moral Philosophy to the Sages; in Physics and Dialectic to the Logician; in Politics to the men with knowledge of Statecraft. This leaves very little for Prediction to deal with, and reduces it mostly to mere guesswork. He quotes Euripides, the poet and playwright:

“The best diviner I maintain to be  
The man who guesses or conjectures best,”

and adds: “Whatever can be foreknown by means of Science, Reason, Experience, or Conjecture, is to be referred not to diviners, but to experts.”

Divining was thus defined as “The knowledge and foretelling of things which happen by chance”. “But how,” he continues, “can we possibly foresee an event which happens at random, as the result of blind accident or unstable chance? Where reasonable men like farmers or doctors fail, is it likely that we shall succeed by means of entrails, birds, portents, oracles or dreams?” Eclipses can be foretold, but on what lore does the finding of treasure depend?

Besides, there is really no such thing as chance: “It is not in the power of a god himself to know what is going to happen accidentally or by chance. For if he knows, then the event is certain to happen; but if it is certain to happen, then Chance does not exist.”

If Chance is excluded we must substitute Fate. Here he has got to the point and promises to write a whole book about Fate—a promise he did not live to fulfil. “If there is Fate,” he declares, “divination is useless, since you cannot alter it by obeying omens.” More than that: “If all things happen by Fate, it does no good to be warned to be on our guard, since that which is to happen

will happen, regardless of what we do. But if that which is to be can be turned aside there is no such thing as Fate."

Knowledge of the future is a positive disadvantage if you can do nothing to alter it. If Priam, King of Troy, had known what was to happen to him it would have only added to his suffering beforehand. If Cæsar had known he was to be assassinated he would have been no better off. Nor, we may add, would Cicero himself if he had known what was soon to be his fate. As an unknown Greek poet has said:

"That which has been decreed by Fate to be,  
Almighty Jove himself cannot prevent,"

and he summarises the dilemma: either

- (1) it is impossible to foresee things which happen by chance; or
- (2) if fated, there is no such thing as chance.

He then goes on to consider methods of prediction in detail. They are so utterly unreasonable—these signs in the bodies of sacrificed animals; if the omens are unfavourable you can try another victim, or do you really believe that a god has interfered and altered the insides of all of them? Do you really believe that Jupiter would have made a cock crow, and would employ chickens to announce the triumph of a great State like Rome? Are dreams, which are more confused than the ravings of insane people, to be taken as messages from heaven? It was clever of the author of the Sibylline Books to "employ a mass of obscurity so that the verses might be adapted to different situations at different times", but are we going to say, he asks, "that a god has done this"?

—It was as if to-day we were to declare that the Almighty had composed *Old Moore's Almanack*!

His trouble, however, was that these practices were bound up with the ancient religion of Rome. He did not want to hurt men's feelings. Still less did he wish to attack sincere belief, but he saw that it was making it ridiculous in the eyes of thinking men. So he concludes: "Speaking frankly, Superstition, which is widespread among the nations, has taken advantage of human weakness to cast its spell over the minds of almost every man. For I thought that I should be rendering a great service both to myself and to my countrymen, if I could tear up this Superstition by the roots. But I want it distinctly understood that the destruction of Superstition does not mean the destruction of Religion."

## II

The Jews were free from this folly. There is a typical story told by Josephus (c. A.D. 35-95) of a certain Masollam, one of the Jewish horsemen who conducted the Roman army. The augur declared that they must halt. He "showed them a bird from whence he took the augury and told them that if the bird stayed where it was they ought all to stand still, but that if it got up and flew forward they must all go forward, and that if it flew back towards them they must retire again. Masollam made no reply, but drew his bow and shot at the bird, and hit it and killed it", asking how the bird could tell them anything useful when it did not even foresee how to save itself!

We find the same contempt for such superstition in the Old Testament. Certain stories have survived of men's

belief in predictions, especially in the older parts, but, generally, wizardry and witchcraft, soothsayers and dream interpreters, trance mediums and men possessed of evil spirits are mentioned only to be condemned.

But the condemning criticism is constructive. It shows a better way. The prophet was not merely a man who foretold what was to come; he was rather the man who preached great eternal principles of God's working and declared what would happen if they were disregarded. Inspiration was not that of the man possessed or like the Delphic oracle speaking through a woman dazed and stupefied by inhaling poisonous fumes, but the quickening of spiritual insight through the inbreathing of the Spirit. As Locke said: "God, in making the prophet doth not unmake the man."

The wrong idea was there and the story of Jonah was told to refute it. The importance of the story has nothing to do with the "whale", which is brought in to round off the first part. Its lessons are two: first, that you cannot evade God's commands by running away, and, secondly, that men must be told, not what is going to happen, but what will happen if they do not alter their ways. Jonah denounced and threatened Nineveh, the symbol of the world, and when the men of that "great city" repented he sulked because his predictions did not "come off". He had predicted a destruction of the enemies of Israel and was disgusted at the idea of the Ninevites being admitted into any sort of League of Nations.

So in the New Testament Christ silenced the men possessed of evil spirits. St. Paul rebuked Elymas the sorcerer, and exorcised the "certain damsel" at Philippi who was "possessed with a spirit of divination which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying".



The first Jewish Christians shared the hopes of their fellow countrymen who looked for the coming of a Messiah, and embodied them in apocalyptic writing, a recognised form of literature that used symbols that were definitely used not in a literal, but in a spiritual sense.

As Dr. Lowther Clarke has shown in his essay on "The Clouds of Heaven" in his book *Divine Humanity* (S.P.C.K., 1936), "the early Church well understood what was meant by the language of symbolism. The 'cloud' or 'the clouds of heaven' represented the order of spiritual things as contrasted with the material order of this world". "When our Lord said, 'Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven', He referred to His Ascension, not to a Descent, to His vindication by the Father, and only indirectly to a judgment of the world."

When St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians (1 Cor. xv, 47) "The Second Man is the Lord from Heaven": "There is no suggestion of Christ coming down to tread this earth. If the imagery of Daniel was still potent, the Cloud rather suggests that He and His own are brought to the Ancient of Days."

So, again, "the right hand of God" means "wherever He works". It is with our right hands that we do things, but God has not got a right hand with four fingers and a thumb. As St. Augustine taught, *Dextra Dei ubique est*. "The right hand of God is everywhere."

In the early church there was already an expectation of a visible return of Christ to earth. St. Paul shared it at any rate at first, but at Thessalonica, it would seem, it was upsetting people, so he wrote to them urging them to "study to be quiet and to do your own business", to go on working steadily like other people. The belief

remained, but when we read his epistles as a whole we realise how small a part it played in his mind. The greater part of his letters is filled with advice, and teaching, and regulations, which seem to imply a long future for the Church on earth. By the time that St. John wrote his gospel in his old age the expectation seems practically to have passed away. Men realised that He had already come a second time, that He was in their midst where two or three are gathered together in His name.

### III

Practically to have passed away, for it has always been found surviving in all ages. There have always been men who held these beliefs, but they have been in a small minority and it has been only a little stream in the great broad flood of Christian beliefs and life.

They were found mainly in the smaller sects. Papias, almost the earliest writer that we have outside the New Testament, who had known some of the apostles himself and had been acquainted with many who had known them well, was, unfortunately, a Millenarian and had extravagant ideas about the wonderful fertility of crops that was to come with the reign of Christ. I say "unfortunately", because Eusebius the historian, who had read his works, thought he was a man "of mean understanding" and only quoted a few lines from them about what he had heard from these men he had known. The Montanists had extravagant ideas on the subject and alienated the main body of Christians, so that they for some time hesitated to recognise St. John's Apocalypse among the books of the New Testament. Some of the apocryphal gospels of the second and later centuries are

full of wild notions about what was to happen when Christ came, and writers like the author of the *Apocalypse of Peter* let loose the reins of their imagination in describing the future judgment of the world with pictures which have been the main source of the "popular" belief in hell that has turned so many away from Christianity. But, on the whole, St. Augustine interpreted the mind of the Church when, in his book *The City of God* (Bk. xx, Ch. v), he spoke of the Kingdom already established by Christ's First Advent; His coming "which continuously occurs in His Church, that is, in His members, in which He comes little by little, and piece by piece, since the whole Church is His Body." Since the Reformation, when printing and the cheaper manufacture of paper made the Bible accessible to the mass of the people while education to read it lingered, there have been, from time to time, considerable revivals of Millenarianism, but they have been, for the most part, among the ardent smaller and less central bodies, among simple people, and mainly in the new countries of America where State education has been purely secular and religious teaching has been banished from the schools of the people.

## IV

This Millenarianism has been largely due to a false idea of the Bible and its inspiration. Men always want an infallible authority. They like to be told what to think and to feel certain that they are right. In the Middle Ages the authority of the Church was regarded as the chief guide, and the Pope, as its representative, came to be more and more regarded as infallible. When his claims were repudiated, men instinctively turned to the written

Word and began to consider the Bible as the infallible Guide.

Modern exponents of Millenarianism nearly always start with some such statement as "The Bible is True" or "We believe in the Word of God", and often abuse those who differ from them in what they mean by this, calling them "Modernists" or "Higher Critics", rather than explaining why they differ and in what they think they are wrong. They frequently misquote St. Paul's words in 2 Timothy iii, 16, as "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

They do not notice that the word "*is*" is printed in their Bibles in italics, showing that it is not in the original. They do not, as a rule, know any Greek so as to be able to read St. Paul's exact words as he wrote them. Now it may be true that the word translated "Scripture" (*Graphe*) is elsewhere in the New Testament always used for the Holy Scriptures, but in itself it means just "writing", and to the Greeks at Thessalonica may well have meant no more. It is, at least, allowable to translate the words—with many of the Fathers and early translations, including the Latin version made by the great scholar St. Jerome—as the English scholars who made the Revised Version of 1881 rendered it: "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness." This is undoubtedly true; while St. Paul would never have said that every writing was inspired of God, because he would have known that much that is written is very far indeed from being inspired or profitable in any way at all.

That is not all. Too often they recognise no degrees



of inspiration, but in talking about "the Bible" put the Old Testament and the New, the Sermon on the Mount and the Jewish ceremonial law, the stories of cruelty that a people, groping after a truer idea of God but not yet reaching it, attributed to the action of the Deity and St. Paul's chapter on Charity, or Love, all on one level. They ask "Doesn't it say" this or that, ignoring the fact that Christ contrasted what was "said by them of old time" with what "I say unto you".

Even that, again, is not all. They start with preconceived theories and then hunt for texts to support them. Men who would limit God's power to this world and say that He cannot, or who limit His love in the next and say that He will not save men who repent there as here, will triumphantly misquote the words of Ecclesiastes as "As the tree falls so must it lie"; whereas the preacher's words are merely the statement of an agricultural observation, "If a tree falls towards the south or towards the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there shall it lie." Even where the application of the text quoted may be a good one, as when Handel put to music the words "I know that my Redeemer liveth", a reading of the passage in the context will show that Job had no vision of the redemption of mankind by Christ. The text "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son" means "a young woman (*almah* in Hebrew) shall conceive" and refers, apparently, to Isaiah's wife. It was the knowledge of the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was not born as other men are that led to the quotation of the text. It was clearly not the text that gave rise to the belief. Quite unconsciously, and with the best intentions, men start with fixed convictions and hunt about for texts to support them. By such means you can prove

anything you like. But it is not the right way to use the Bible or to learn what it has to tell us about God.

## v

To conclude: The Bible must be read with judgment. It must be read continuously, with an open mind to notice coincidences and contrasts. Single texts can only be quoted as authoritative when they harmonise with, and sum up, whole passages.

The most inspired parts, those in which our Lord speaks by word and example, must be put in the first place and studied most.

The Bible as a whole must be studied as the history of God's revelation of Himself to men, not as a sort of crossword puzzle to find hidden messages buried in a mass of irrelevant matter. It is to be read to lead us to a knowledge of God and not as a sort of mine from which to dig out charms.

And, lastly, it must be read with humility and with readiness to learn, not with a determination to make it mean just what we choose. If we have no knowledge of the original languages in which it was written we must do our best to profit by the work of others, to consult, at least, the more accurate renderings of the *Revised Version*, even if we love the sound of the words of the *Authorized*. We must get rid of that nasty attitude of suspicion which makes men think that those who are most learned and have studied it most are to be distrusted as likely to use it for their own ends.

### CHAPTER III

#### *Religious Prediction To-day*

*“True religion takes up that place in the mind, which superstition would usurp, and so leaves little room for it; and likewise lays us under the strongest obligation to oppose it”*—Bp. BUTLER, *Sermons for Public Occasions*. Sermon I, preached before the Society for Propagation of the Gospel. § 15.

THE great mass of popular prediction-mongering is mere superstition. It is best met by the study of Natural Science showing what are the laws governing material things, and what cards, creases in the palm of the hand, mascots and other idols and the mental abstractions from them, such as numbers, colours, and the like, can tell us and what they can't; or by sound Psychology which examines the causes of dreams, intuitions, and abnormal consciousness, and what they can tell us and what is beyond their power. All their pretensions to tell the future are, as we saw, best met by the fact that it can't be told since man has Free Will and that the future is not fixed by Fate.

But, as Cicero felt long ago, superstition is more serious when it is mixed up with religion. It then gains a force from sincere belief in God which it does not possess by itself. It finds a support from the truth that God works with a purpose, from the fact that in certain things He is acting as a Person and may overrule men's wills, and even tell us what He is going to do.

But it is worse than ever if it gives us a false idea of God, if it says that He predestines everything and leaves us no will at all. Worse still if it implies that He blames and punishes men for doing what He gave them no chance of not doing, for it makes Him out a cruel and sadistic tyrant. And it is, if not morally yet practically, worst of all if it makes Him seem to do silly things, since that makes religion altogether absurd in the eyes of men who cannot believe in a silly God.

## I

There are, as we saw, three types of religious prediction with a certain vogue to-day. Let us examine them a little more in detail.

The British Israel movement professes to be based on the Bible. But the great body of scholars, both Jewish and Christian, do not hold that there is this alleged contrast of Israelites and Jews. There is neither proof nor probability, they declare, that all the men of the schismatic kingdom of Israel were carried away captive. Many were left behind, and individuals belonging to the northern tribes are, they point out, mentioned in the New Testament as then living in Palestine. Their considered opinions can be found in any standard work, such as the *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics* or in the *Jewish Encyclopædia*.

There is no evidence of the continued separate existence of the ten tribes and of their journeying through Europe. The town "Arsareth" in which it is alleged that they gathered simply means, so Hebrew scholars tell us, "another land". Persons ignorant of Hebrew and Greek (for nearly all the Apocrypha exists only in Greek) could



have easily found this out by consulting any commentary or even the Revised Version of 2 Esdras xiii, 45. There is no evidence that the exiles kept together, that they passed through Scandinavia and changed to a fair-haired "Aryan" type, no evidence that they came to England or that the mixture of races, Britons or Welsh (who are of the same stock as the French Bretons), Picts, Jutes, Normans, and Saxons from whom we English are descended were all like one nation of Israelites.

Yet British Israelites boldly ask "Do you know that the researches of modern scholars all (sic) agree that the various detachments which flowed into Britain were one basic stock? *All were one people?*" (which is only true in the sense that all European people except the Jews, the Laplanders, and to a large extent the Hungarians are "Aryan"), and "Do you know that Christianity was first brought to Britain about A.D. 36 by Joseph of Arimathea?" (the authority for which is a Celtic legend coming from Brittany in France somewhere about the eleventh century, and fused with an older Welsh legend about Merlin by a writer of the school that invented the stories about King Arthur who, if he was an historical character, had been dead some five hundred years when the author wrote).

They are as ignorant of languages as they are of history. They point to the similarity of the word "British" with the Hebrew word *b'rith* or "Covenant" and *ish* "man" as proving that it means "Covenant Man". But "man of a covenant" would in Hebrew be *Ish b'rith* not *B'rit ish*. Briton, or Brython as the Welsh to-day spell the word, was, and still is, the name a Welshman gives himself as contrasted with a Sais, Saxon or Englishman, and *ish* is the qualifying suffix common to most Aryan,

non-Semitic, languages: -ikh (Sanskrit), -ik (Greek or Hellenic), -ic (Latin or Italic), -ais (French or *Français*), -isch (German or *Deutsch*), -ig (Welsh, *Brythonig* or *Cymreig*). British is the English form of this latter word.

The connection between the Cimmerians mentioned by Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) and the Welsh word *Cymru*, also used to distinguish Wales from *Lloegr* or England is, to say the least of it, doubtful. Again, Meshech in Genesis x, 2, and 1 Chronicles i, 5, stands for the tribe of the Moschi, of whom Dr. Margoliouth tells us in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible* "Too little is known of their language and customs to make it possible to locate them ethnographically". But at least it is clear that it is not the same as Moscow. Yet I have seen it stated in a British Israel publication as a clear prophecy that Russia would soon attack the British in the Holy Land, that Ezekiel says (Ch. xxxviii, 2, 16) that "Gog the prince of Meshech riding upon horses, a great company and a mighty army—shall come up against my people Israel as a cloud to cover the land"; and that this will happen soon is strikingly confirmed by the fact that the Soviet Government recently issued a stamp with three men riding on horses in the foreground and a cloud in the background!

It is only fair to say that for more intelligent readers there are books—such as that of the Rev. Alban Heath, *The Faith of a British Israelite*—in which these grotesque absurdities find no place, but this sort of literature is put out and appeals to the bewilderment of the less educated.

To make predictions in this way out of strained similarities in words is to make the Almighty a maker of feeble puns. To find forced hidden meanings in prophecies,

unintelligible for centuries, is to turn the Bible into a sort of difficult crossword puzzle. It creates a belief that the Holy Spirit deliberately inspired prophets to say things that were meant to mean nothing; nay, were actually intended to mislead people for over two thousand years. It makes impossible any real intelligent understanding of the Bible.

As if this were not enough the Great Pyramid has been dragged into the question. This is no new thing. The first to see in it a connection with Christian prophecy seems to have been C. Piazza Smyth in his book *Our Inheritance in the Great Pyramid* (London, 1st Ed. 1864), but it is only in recent years that its supposed prophecies have been elaborated and exploited.

The Great Pyramid and its neighbouring Sphinx, standing forsaken, save for curious tourists, in the sandy desert but a few miles from Cairo, has always been among the wonders and mysteries of the world. It is the tomb, as Dr. J. H. Breasted tells us in his book *The Conquest of Civilisation*, p. 63 (Harpers, 1926), of King Khufu or Cheops, built about 2900 B.C., "the greatest stone building ever erected by ancient man". It is "a solid mass of masonry containing about two million, three hundred thousand blocks of masonry, each weighing, on an average, two and a half tons; that is, each block is as heavy as a large wagon-load of coal. The sides of the pyramid at the base are seven hundred and fifty-five feet long—and the building was nearly five hundred feet high. An ancient story preserved by Herodotus tells us that a hundred thousand men were working at this royal tomb for twenty years and we can well believe it".

The central and other chambers and the passages leading to them have been opened, and it is alleged that

the measurements of them foretell exactly the dates of events coming to pass in the present day.

A short detailed examination of these can be found in *The Secret of the Great Pyramid* in the S.P.C.K. *Churchman's Penny Books*, No. 19, by Miss M. D. R. Willink, who tells us that her father helped Piazzzi Smyth to take the measurements on which his solution of the cryptogram was based. *The Covenant Publishing Company* publish several books and pamphlets explaining the Anglo-Israel interpretation of the measurements. In one of these the apex is called "the spiritual centre of gravity" and symbolises "our Lord as the apex stone". The apex of an imaginary inverted pyramid is called the "materialistic centre of gravity", symbolising the gold now frozen in the war. How an apex of a pyramid can possibly be a centre of gravity of anything, material or immaterial, is difficult to imagine. A granite plug in the first ascending passage symbolises, we are told, that "a barrier has been placed in the way of Love that only God can lead men to".

Think what this implies—that the Almighty inspired all, or perhaps only a band, of those three hundred thousand, compelled to perhaps the most cruel and brutal slavery that the world has ever seen, unconsciously to place the plug there so that for five thousand years it should keep its secret while the world was kept (I suppose by their sins) from knowing anything about the removal of the hindrance to the way of Love in order to confirm the faith of a little band of men in Buckingham Gate, London, S.W.1. It is perhaps not surprising that a work like the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (11th Ed., 1910) thinks it enough to say on the subject of the British Israel theory: "The contention that the British people in the United



Kingdom, its colonies, and the United States, are the racial descendants of the 'ten tribes' forming the kingdom of Israel, large numbers of which were deported by Sargon, King of Assyria, in 721 B.C. The theory (which is set forth in a book called *Philo Israel*) rests on premises which are deemed by scholars—both theological and anthropological—to be utterly unsound."

It is sometimes argued that British Israelitism may be silly, but it is harmless. "Why shouldn't people," it is said, "believe it if they like?" But it does not stop with mere anthropological speculation. As we have seen, it implies a wrong conception of the Almighty, and wrong conceptions of God affect character. Too often Anglo-Israelitism borrows from the Old Testament the false and militaristic belief of some of the Jews of old that they were the Chosen People, chosen and elected to dominate the world by force of arms rather than to serve the Gentiles by giving them the knowledge of God. It denies that the other nations have their share in the high calling of Christian civilisation and religion. It pours scorn on anything of the nature of a League of Nations and panders to a form of national pride which, fortunately, is not characteristic of the English people as a whole.

## II

We have outlined the teaching of Pastor Russell and his book *Millennial Dawn* above. Let us examine his book a little more closely.

The first volume, called *The Plan of the Ages*, came out in 1886. As we saw, Pastor Russell had revolted from the Calvinism, or "Orthodoxy" as he called it, in which

he had been brought up, and nearly became an infidel, throwing over the Bible as being (as infidels asserted) "an old fiddle on which any tune can be played". He had come across a diagram drawn up by the *London Missionary Society*, such as many of us have seen in our youth. It mapped out a large number of black squares to represent "the heathen"; a lesser but still large number nearly as dark to represent the Mohammedans; another, bigger and lighter but still dark, to stand for Greek and Roman Catholics; and a completely white one for Protestants. He believed that "Orthodoxy" taught that "all these billions of humanity" are on the straight road to everlasting torment, and of the 116,000,000 Protestants, all except a very few saints, are sure of the same fate." In all, during the six thousand years that, as he believed, the world had existed, the numbers would amount to some 142,000,000,000,000 lost souls.

So he drew up a diagram of what he supposed was the real course of history. On p. 66 we see two and a half semi-circles representing "Great Epochs called Worlds", first "the World that was, ending with the Flood"; then "the Present Evil World, at the end of which God's Kingdom is established"; and, finally, "the World to Come". The middle semi-circle is divided into three ages: the Patriarchal, the Jewish, and the Gospel Age.

Unfortunately, though he did not adopt the extreme course of throwing over the Bible altogether, he had, neither by education nor by tradition, any reasonable theory as to how it should be read. He saw it was natural that God should give us His assurance that Right would ultimately triumph, and that He should inspire His prophets to tell us so. He realised that He gradually revealed Himself more and more till men were ready to

receive Him incarnate on earth. He saw that this was in the Bible. But he was no scholar, so he fell back on what is nowadays called "Fundamentalism", and took for his guide the doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration, assuming that the "Authorized" English translation of 1611 was infallible and that every word was as equally inspired as any other.

He treated traditional doctrine and interpretation very freely. He called attention to texts saying that Christ died for all (p. 103). He has sound words about Conscience and Free Will (p. 119). He puts forward a nice suggestion that Adam sinned on purpose so as not to be separated from Eve (p. 124). He declared that wilful sinners were to be annihilated at the First Judgment (p. 141). He sees that it would be impossible for billions to be examined and sentenced in a twenty-four hours day, so that the usual descriptions of the "Day" of Judgment must be a parable. "A period of about six thousand years," he writes, "intervenes between the world's first and second judgment, and during this long period two special classes are selected from among men, are specially tried, disciplined, and trained, to be the honoured instruments of Jehovah during the period, or day, of the world's judgment".

He alludes to the Great Pyramid as a work of what he rather fantastically calls the "Brain Age", but only as showing a knowledge of Mathematics and Astronomy, and uses it as a symbol of God's plan in his diagram. "Finally," he says, "it will require the entire Millennial Age to accomplish the work of restoring to the perfection of manhood. Some will be destroyed in the end of the Millennial Reign—because, when provided with full opportunity to become perfect men, in harmony with God

and the law of love, they chose evil. Such die the second death, from which there is no resurrection or restitution promised.”

The second volume, *The Time is at Hand*, was published in 1888. In it he calculates the exact times at which all these things will happen. October 1874 was the date of “the beginning of the Times of Restitution”. Social Reform measures were then “ushering in the Earth’s Great Jubilee”. He shared to the full the optimism of the Victorian Age.

In 1878 there were, he wrote, already signs of the return of the Jews to favour. Lord Beaconsfield, a Jew, was the central figure of the Berlin Congress, but, though favour was due and began in 1878, the Jew was not to be received into full favour until A.D. 1914, the date of the “closing of the Times of the Gentiles”!

Chapter ix, “The Man of Sin”, contains his prophecy as to the rapid development of Anti-Christ, that is, according to his interpretation, the Pope: “The final extinction of this hierarchy, near the close of the Day of Wrath and Judgment already begun—which will close, as is shown by the ‘Times of the Gentiles’ with the year 1914”, and he asks “Is there room for doubt?” adding that “The present governments must all be overturned before the close of A.D. 1914.”

The remaining volumes seem to have been published, but I have not been able to see them. A list will be found in the *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopædia of Religious Knowledge*, published in America between the years 1897 and 1904. There was then still an active organisation of distribution. One hundred and ninety million pages of tracts and two million six hundred and eighty-four thousand five hundred copies of *Millennial Dawn* had



been sold. It had been translated into many languages. But the sale has probably decreased, unless an amended edition has been published, since the year 1914.

What strikes us in reading this extraordinary production is that it is evidently the work of a man of kindly and shrewd nature, writing with a mind "unbiased" by any knowledge, or sense, of history. For him there are only "Bible times" and "the present day". There is nothing incongruous, to his mind, in the idea of God's leaving the world in complete darkness since the beginning of the Christian Era till the days of Queen Victoria.

He seems to have become conscious of this defect when he came to write his second volume and to have tried to fill the gap. But, unfortunately, he had inherited a quite unreasoning prejudice against the Church of Rome. Naturally, in the case of a body that has existed for so many centuries and in so many different countries, it is not hard to make a list of its mistakes, even of its cruelties and crimes. These he hunts for and strings together.

Unfortunately, the Millennial Dawn movement is only one among several similar sects. But when you have studied one you have practically studied all.

One of the most advertised of these is that connected with "Judge", or as some of his followers call him, Brother J. S. Rutherford, President of the two *Watch Tower and Bible Tract Societies* (one incorporated) and of the *International Bible Students' Association*, 124 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, N.Y., U.S.A. We can learn about it from the official 1941 *Year Book of Jehovah's Witnesses*, containing report for the fiscal year of 1940. Also *Daily Texts and Comments*, and other publications (London Factory, 34 Craven Terrace, W.2.). This book gives an account of its break with the original movement of Pastor

Russell when it became quite clear that his prediction had miscarried. The "end of the world" was still said to have come in 1914, but it was explained that whereas before that "Satan's uninterrupted rule" had lasted, in 1918 "the Lord Jesus Christ came to the Temple of Jehovah" (pp. 29, 36), though the fact was not realised till 1922 (p. 31), and "it was not till 1931 that the name of those fully devoted to Jehovah God and his King was properly understood to be 'Jehovah's witnesses'" to his "Theocratic Government". Then there follows a full detailed report of their literary activities in English and in foreign languages, their distribution in various lands, and of the opposition they have met with. This fills the largest part of the Report, which ends with a Conclusion saying (p. 246): "Whether it shall be the Lord's will that another Year Book be published before Armageddon, of course no one can say. What the immediate future holds it would be unwise to try to predict. All the surrounding circumstances, however, indicate that the battle of Armageddon is near at hand, which means the end of wickedness in the earth and the full ushering in of righteousness, etc. etc."

The Year Book is the work of men who know how to appeal to simple-minded people. It is full of repetition and of irrelevant quotations from the Bible. But it is not clear in its statements, so that it is not very easy out of its pages of declamation and spate of words to make out what exactly Brother Rutherford and his Jehovah's Witnesses really do teach.

But among many other things three seem to stand out clearly. It declares (1) *Their work is the work of God and not of men*. They have not formed an organisation. God has formed it. They do not ordain ministers. God does

that. They only recognise them when He has ordained them. Therefore all they do is right and all others do is wrong and the work of Satan. Religion is belief practically organised in a church. Therefore all religions and all churches are the creations of Satan. In this they carry Pastor Russell's belief still further and say that this is specially true of the Roman Catholic Church. "Every inch of ground," they say (p. 197), "gained by the war against the Chinese now belongs (sic) to the Roman Catholic Hierarchy, where she practises her wicked God-dishonouring racket."

With words like these they go about insulting the religion of others, and when these others try to stop them, or even appeal to the civil authorities to stop them, they complain that they are being persecuted.

(2) *The prediction of the Coming Theocratic Government.* Christ is to come and, by supernatural means, is to win the battle of Armageddon, at which all enemies are to be destroyed. This apparently means that all who disagree with them are to be annihilated. Therefore Jehovah's Witnesses—though, as they carefully explain, they are not pacifists for they look forward to this military triumph—refuse all military service of any kind, under the plea of "neutrality" (p. 105).

(3) *Only Jehovah's Witnesses*—including some perhaps who would join them no doubt, if they knew about the movement—*will share in the new kingdom.* It is not made quite clear whether it is to be set up in heaven or on earth, or whether they are to be given eternal life in another order, or whether the "Millions now living" who "will never die" (the phrase does not occur in the Report) will simply live on on earth. The appeal is frankly to self-interest. You need not, indeed you must not, join

a church which meets for common worship, which has a creed to answer the problems of life, which undertakes practical work to help your neighbour. You need no rebirth and no stress seems to be laid on sanctification of character. All, it would seem, that you have to do is to sell or distribute Jehovah's Witness literature. The rest of the world they appear to consign to annihilation without a qualm.

I may have misrepresented the teaching of the Year Book. I may have misunderstood it. I hope I have. People should study it for themselves with these few criticisms in their minds. They will see that it is at least capable of being "misunderstood" in this sense.

[Since the above was written Brother Rutherford has himself died.]

### III

Very different in spirit are those whom, for want of a better name, we may classify as "Second Adventists". These are generally members within the borders of the various religious bodies, sharing wholeheartedly in their life, and only rarely forming separate communities. They expect a visible return of Christ to earth, but it is not, primarily at least, a political kingdom that He is to set up; nor do they as a rule try to predict exactly when it will be established. They hold that it is not for us to "know times and seasons", and their writings do not pander to idle speculation and curiosity.

But if we think out the implications of their belief, we are faced with serious difficulties. For instance, we may ask: "Where would He live?" The fact is that life has grown so complicated that government cannot be carried



on by one man unless he is omnipresent. The conditions of Palestine when Christ first came to earth were quite different, and we may see signs of purpose in His preparing and choosing them. Palestine was a small country, though it had relations with the Jews dispersed throughout the Roman empire. The quiet of the country in Galilee was not far from the city life of Jerusalem. The capital itself was small, though a miniature world of Roman civil government and the Jewish Temple religion was not too large for a single person to influence everyone in it to some degree. But, even so, Christ definitely limited His work, first to the little nation and then to training a small band of disciples to carry out His work in the whole world.

But an objection more serious to such teaching of the Second Adventists is that the thought of such a coming in the future is apt to distract our thoughts from His coming to us now. When men in the early Church expected Christ to appear visibly, apart from the fact that He did not so come, they were in danger of forgetting that He said: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." "It is expedient for you that I go away," for as long as He was bound by the body to one place He could only be with a few, but by "going away" to Heaven, to the right hand of God—"wherever God works"—He was able in His human nature to be present everywhere by the work of the Holy Spirit.

So while Second Adventism is a permissible opinion we must see to it, if we hold it, that it does not condemn others or imply that for nearly two thousand years they have had to be contented with an inferior Christianity.

## IV

Anglo-Israelitism, Millennial Dawn, and Second Adventism have been taken as typical of three classes of prediction in religion. There have been many other forms in the past and there are many other organisations in the present; but they all have a family likeness.

We have noticed its existence in the early Church and the Middle Ages. There have been many more forms since the Reformation, especially in America. According to Dr. S. J. Case, writing in the *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics* (Art. "Second Adventism") they have made various predictions as to the date of the Millennium. John Napier (1593) put it in the years 1688-1700; Joseph Mede (1627) in 1660; William Whiston (1706) in 1715, 1734 or 1866; Pierre Jurieu (1686) in 1689, when the Antichrist, or Pope, was to meet his downfall; and J. A. Bengel (1740) in 1836.

Many have formed Millennial sects. The Ronsdorf sect at Elberfeld (1726) put the beginnings of the Millennium in 1730. The Shaker Communities under Ann Lee (1774) thought it was "near". Christopher Hoffmann and the Friends of the Temple, which they proposed to rebuild, announced in 1881 the imminent coming of Christ. Edward Irving, founding the Catholic Apostolic Church in 1823, put the Second Coming in 1864. The Plymouth Brethren (1827-31) thought it was "imminent". The Mormons (1830) went to Utah to await their ascension to heaven. William Miller (1831) and the Evangelical Adventists expected it on October 22, 1844. The failure of his prediction led the Seventh Day Adventists to separate in 1845. The Church of God (1866), the Advent Christians (1861), the Life and Advent Union (1862),

and the Age to Come Adventists (1888) followed, but no dates for their predictions are given. Pastor Russell (1886), as we saw, gave 1914 as the date of the Dawn of the Millennium. The *Encyclopædia* was published in 1912, so no more recent sects are mentioned.

## v

To sum up. There is very real danger in these forms of Prediction that, by their connection with religion, they may drag down Christianity to the level of astrology, crystal gazing, card laying, palmistry, graphology, numerology, dream-interpretation, theosophy, fortune telling, belief in mascots, lucky charms, and quack medicines.

There is a very real danger, in certain of its forms, of fostering national pride and arrogance, of associating religion with the lust of domination rather than with the duties of service, and so of preventing men from taking part in the real contribution our nation may be able to make towards the well-being of the world.

## CHAPTER IV

### *The Remedy for Prediction*

*“The Mind believes by Nature and by Nature the Will loves, so that if true objects fail they join themselves to false”*—PASCAL, *Pensées* No. 81.

IN all the above we have been forced to be critical. It was necessary to clear the ground. But it is never enough to be merely negative. The last state of the man whose house was swept and garnished after it had been exorcised was, we are warned, worse than the first. Besides, the best way in criticism is always constructive. Any fool, the saying goes, can find fault, and till you can suggest a better way you had better hold your tongue.

#### I

In doing this the best way to begin is not so much by correcting details as by finding out the principles underlying them and getting them right. We must make it clear that the root error of all these forms of prediction is, in the long run, the belief in Fate and the denial of man's Free Will and Moral Responsibility. They nearly all assume that the future is fixed, not merely in general outline, but in date and detail.

Materialists say that it is fixed by the Laws of Nature just as the movements of the stars (which we cannot reach) are fixed. Determinists say that our wills are merely the result of circumstances in our bodies or in



our surroundings, and that it is a delusion to think that we are free to mould the future. Those who believe in God and, at the same time, in detailed inevitable prediction are Predestinarians, and declare that He has fixed everything beforehand and has deluded us in making us believe that we are free. Fatalism in various forms has all through history been the enemy. Free Will is a fact of direct experience, and we must insist on this.

We must distinguish between what is fixed and what is free. In the realm of Physical Nature we must assume that all works by law. We must not expect miracles, though, of course, the higher laws of Human Nature can use those natural laws for their own purposes and "interfere" with their working, and the Highest Divine Nature of God can overrule them when there is need. But normally it is best for our education here on earth to believe that the background of life is regular and unchanging. We can predict eclipses and give the hours of high and low tides. We can assume that seed time and harvest will not fail, that poisons can cause death, and that self-indulgence will weaken our bodies.

Again, there is no such thing really as Chance. Material things follow the law of cause and effect. Spiritual and moral things are the result of originating or "first" causes, namely, the wills of men, and, to a much smaller extent, of animals. When we shuffle a pack of cards (I assume we are not conjurers or cardsharps) the motions of our hand exactly determine how they will go, but as we cannot determine it ourselves we can play "games of chance". Weather forecasts can be correctly made for the immediate future, but the factors involved are so many and so incalculable that our meteorologists can only predict probabilities. But there can be no con-

nection between the order in which the cards are dealt out and future events in our lives after the deal is made. There can be no connexion between the creases made in the palms of our hands when we close our fists again and again and our personal character or future experiences. A bad handwriting may show that in the past we were badly taught at school and that in the future we shall be a nuisance to our friends by writing illegibly if we don't learn to do better, but it can do no more. So we must get clear in our minds what is fixed and what is free. The future depends on men's wills. Our purposes reach out into the times to come, but they meet with other purposes of other men and the results are not certain. They do not exist yet, and things which do not exist cannot be known.

We are right in believing that great principles are eternal, that pride comes before a fall, that if you sow the wind you will reap the whirlwind, that those who take the sword will perish by the sword, and a thousand other things that experience has taught men. There is a place, and more than a place, for the prophets who tell us of the unchanging Laws of God and of the consequences *if* we disobey them, who will bid us learn from our experience in the past the way to fulfil our duties in the future.

All this depends on our belief in God and on a worthy belief in His Nature, that He ordains and upholds the unity of Law in the material world, that in the spiritual world

“Though the mills of God grind slowly yet they grind  
exceeding small,

Though with Patience He stands waiting with exact-  
ness grinds He all.”

And if we are puzzled to reconcile His omniscience with the Freedom of Man we may say—and it is sound Theology—that He does not know the future because it does not exist, and even God cannot know what does not exist. It is no derogation to His almighty power to say that He has Himself limited it in giving man Free Will and, as it were, standing aside to give it free play. If this involves a limitation of His knowledge, as some think and some do not, it is a self-limitation which lies within His own power.

But one thing we must believe, namely, that He cannot be silly and hide His messages to man in pyramids and puns. Such superstitions are a relic of polytheism and the worship of demons.

## II

We must be willing to learn. We must take some trouble with our Belief. "The Kingdom of Science," said Bacon, "like the Kingdom of God, must be entered into as a little child." This does not mean that we must blindly accept all we are told. Children do not do that. Those of us who have had anything to do with them know that they are perpetually asking questions. But we, like them, must be ready to learn by the experience of others.

Each authority must be trusted in his own special subject on which he is qualified to speak, whether it be that of Natural Science, of History, or of Theology. We must get rid of the idea that an unbiased mind means one that is ignorant of all that has been said or written on a subject, and of that odious attitude which suspects the expert, just because he knows his subject, of being

untrustworthy because he is sure to use his knowledge for his own ends. That attitude of distrust towards those who know is a certain way of preventing yourself from ever learning anything.

We must trust the astronomer when he tells us about the stars. We must trust the historian when he tells us about the different races of Europe. We must trust the student of languages when he tells us what words mean. We must trust the archæologist when he tells us about the pyramids. We must trust the theologian when he tells us how the books of the Bible were written and what is the nature of prophecy.

We must study history to see what really happened and not merely to find support for our personal opinions. We must read the Bible continuously and not merely to hunt for sentences to prove ideas we have already taken up. We must only quote texts when we have read them as part of the whole chapter they come from and when we are sure that they really sum up the gist of what goes before or comes after.

In reading we should be prepared for traps lying in wait for us. We are always in danger of noticing what we like, of marking only what appeals to us, and in finding only what we set out to look for. This is natural and to a certain extent right, but we must always be ready to hear both sides, alert to see what goes against our own ideas and to reckon with things that qualify our opinions. Especially in looking for fulfilment of prophecies we are always ready to notice fulfilments, but quick to forget the failures to be fulfilled. We must see that we do not prejudge the case, since prejudices, whether political such as pride of race, or religious, when merely critical, are apt to make us see only what we want to see, which is,



too often, only the faults of others. We must train ourselves to recognise good wherever we find it and learn to disagree without ill temper.

## III

But more even than this is needed. It is not a mere matter of intellectual understanding. It is a question of character, and character is forged in the circumstances of daily life. It is character that enables us to judge rightly, and character is influenced by our surroundings.

A narrow environment is the cause of many mistakes. If our lot has been cast in the sidestreams of life, and if we have not had great advantages in education, we may find things difficult to understand. We may have to rely on the learning of others. We may be seriously handicapped in matters of knowledge, and may not be in a position to remedy our defects.

But for the training of character and judgment the way is open to all of us and the remedy is at our doors. Religion is quite the most effective factor in education. But it must be no sectarian creed or new-fangled fancy that we adopt. Life in an historic Church will give us a sense of the past and a value of what we have inherited from the days of old, and membership of a universal organisation will give us a breadth of outlook which no book learning can supply. Moreover, it will give us charity to believe in people and insight to understand them even when they make mistakes. It will save the simple from delusions such as we have been considering. Religion involves a corporate life, but man is an individual as well as a social being. Going to church implies a personal relation to God in the daily life of each side

of our nature. Again, this is not the place to discuss in detail how this is. It is not what Christians disagree about, but their common ground that we want to consider. Broadly speaking, there are two great schools of Personal Religion. There are, first, the Mystics, who lay stress on the Inner Light and emphasise the need of Conversion, the inner yielding of the heart and will to God. They deprecate outward forms and ceremonies as obstructions to the vision of God.

Then there are the Sacramentalists, who plead that the world is God's creation, that "the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made", that Christ the Divine Word took a human form in which to reveal Himself, and that we are ourselves body and soul. They hold, therefore, that besides the Inner Light and the surrender of the Will to God, there is Communion with Him, granted through the "outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace given unto us" in the Sacraments.

But all agree in the present Coming of Christ and that we may leave open the times and seasons of the Second (or should we say Third?) Advent.

What matters in the future is not what is fixed, but how we use our freedom that He has given us to play our part against the fixed background of His laws in Nature. Our duty is in the present. Our belief is that it will make the future bright.

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School of Theology  
at Claremont

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

*The following books may be recommended as giving reliable facts regarding Astronomy; reference is made to books on Prediction in the text of the section dealing with that subject.*

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* on "Astrology", "Astronomy", and "Zodiac", and shorter articles on the various stars and gods and references to further authorities. This work can be consulted in almost any public library.

The *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* on "Sun, Moon, and Stars". This work would be found in any large public library or any good theological library.

Similar articles could be found in any standard encyclopaedia.

*A Key to the Stars*, by R. van der R. Woolley, a former chief assistant at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich, John Couch Adams, Astronomer, Cambridge University Observatory (Blackie & Sons, 5s.) gives the facts in full, simple and popular form. The best and cheapest book I know for the purpose.

*Worlds without End*, by H. Spencer Jones, M.A., Sc.D., F.R.S., Astronomer Royal (English Universities Press Ltd., revised and reprinting) is an excellent popular manual.

Other useful books are *The Stars*, by George Forbes (Benn's Sixpenny Library, out of print); *Astronomy*, by A. A. Hinks (Oxford University Press, 3s. 6d.); *The Mysterious Universe*, by Sir James Jeans (Penguin Books, 1s.); *General Astronomy*, by Sir James Jeans (Arnold, 15s.)

For the question of Free Will, I may perhaps be allowed to refer to two books of my own: *If We Believe in God*, "Lectures in Hyde Park" Series II (S.P.C.K., 2s. 6d.); *Free Will and Determinism*, "Question Time in Hyde Park" (S.P.C.K., 8d.).



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